



A Daughter of the Sierra

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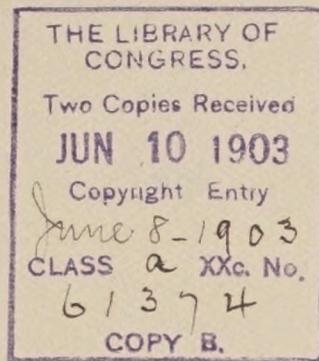
CHRISTIAN REID.

Mrs. Frances C. Fisher Tiernan



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A Daughter of the Sierra.

CHAPTER I.

A MEETING—AND ITS RESULT.

BY one of those accidents on which often hinge, or appear to hinge, the destinies of human life, two men—one entering, the other leaving the Crocker Building in San Francisco on a certain day—almost ran into each other. They recoiled with mutual apologies, simultaneously recognized an acquaintance and shook hands. One was slender, alert, extremely well-dressed, with the keen American business face, clean-shaven in deference to fashion, and wearing eye-glasses above a prominent nose. The other was taller and more sinewy, lean as a greyhound, tanned deeply by the sun, carelessly attired, but with the unmistakable air of a gentleman, and an equally unmistakable look of good blood about the clear-cut contours of the face, with its drooping brown moustache and steady gray eyes.

“Lloyd! Didn’t know you were in San Francisco,” said the first man, whose name was Armistead. “Been here long?”

“Since yesterday,” Philip Lloyd answered. “And you?”

"Oh! I'm here constantly now, except when I am away—which sounds like an Irish bull, but isn't."

"Not in a mining expert," the other laughed.
"Have you been away lately?"

"I'm just back from Puget Sound, where I have been examining a large property."

"For Trafford, I suppose?"

"Yes. All my expert work is done for him at present."

"So I've heard, and—oddly enough—I am just going up to see him. Do you know whether or not he has any place I would fit into?"

Armistead gave the speaker a glance as keen as it was quick.

"I should say that there wouldn't be much difficulty in finding a place into which to fit a man like you," he answered. "By the by, haven't you been a good deal in Old Mexico?"

"I have been there for the greater part of the last five years."

"Prospecting?"

"Part of the time; at other times connected with some large mines."

"Where are you in from last?"

"The State of Durango."

Armistead put his hand on the other's arm.

"Don't go up to see Trafford," he said. "Come and lunch with me."

"But—"

"Don't you understand? I have something to

propose to you—something to your advantage, as the advertisements for missing heirs say."

"In that case, I'm at your service," said Lloyd, turning with an air of decision which matched the clear-cut, sunburnt face and steady eyes.

They went to a restaurant near by, where Armistead called for a private room. Lloyd lifted his brows but made no remark, and when they were alone the former explained.

"I never talk business in a public place," he said, "even when it isn't quite so 'private and particular' as this."

"If the business is private and particular," said Lloyd, "I am afraid I am not the man—"

"Oh, yes you are!" Armistead interrupted. "So exactly the man that our meeting strikes me in the light of a remarkably lucky accident. It's astonishing how these accidents happen to me—how people turn up just when I want them! I knew that you were the very person I wanted as soon as I remembered your connection with Mexico."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Only this, that I wish you to go there immediately—with me."

"You are going to examine a mine?"

"Or to recover one—but here comes the waiter! We'll give our order and then you shall hear all about it."

The order having been given, with great concentration of attention on Armistead's part, and great

indifference on Lloyd's, the waiter departed, and the successful mining expert, leaning back in his chair, looked at the unsuccessful prospector.

"If you are from the State of Durango," he said, "probably you know the districts of San Andrés de la Sierra and Tópia?"

"Better than I know the streets of San Francisco," Lloyd responded.

"Have you ever heard of the Santa Cruz Mine, located somewhere between those two places?"

"Everybody in that country knows the Santa Cruz Mine. It's nearer Tópia than San Andrés, though, and it can't be bought."

"How do you know that?"

"From common report. It's a great ore-producer, and there's no inducement for the owners to sell."

"Who are supposed to be the owners?"

"It belongs partly, or wholly perhaps, to a woman—Doña Beatriz Calderon."

"Hum!—What kind of a woman is she?"

Lloyd lifted his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe!*" he said, dropping into a familiar phrase.

"You must have heard something about the owner of the richest mine in Durango," Armistead persisted.

Lloyd sought in the depths of his memory for a moment, and then produced a nugget of information.

“I think I have heard that she is a widow,” he said.

Armistead shook his head.

“They may call her so,” he remarked; “but in point of fact she is a divorced woman.”

Lloyd stared.

“Impossible!” he said. “The species doesn’t exist in Mexico.”

“It exists in this case; for the husband was an American, who came to the States, got a divorce and remarried here.”

“Do you know him?”

“I had just left him when I met you.”

“You don’t mean Trafford?”

“I mean him exactly. It seems that when he was a young fellow, owning no more than his mule and saddle, he wandered down into Mexico, prospecting. Up in the Sierra Madre, back of Culiacan, he ran across some extremely rich mines owned by a Mexican, who had also a daughter. Trafford was always practical, so he made love to the daughter, married her and got possession of the mines—as her wedding portion, probably.”

“Then left her where he found her, I suppose?”

“No, he must have behaved rather decently—at first. He brought her with him to San Francisco, where, as he states briefly, she cried all the time. So he packed her back to her Mexican home, gave her an allowance, and proceeded to obtain a divorce. He then married the present Mrs. Trafford—wo-

man of fashion, leader of society, all that sort of thing—went on, prospered, and became the man of millions he is to-day."

Lloyd looked the disgust he felt.

"Did the Mexican woman know that she was divorced?" he asked.

"I can't say," Armistead answered; "but there seems no particular reason why she should have been informed."

"Did he return her fortune?"

Armistead regarded the speaker with a smile.

"You have been so long out of the world that you have become a trifle quixotic," he observed. "I don't imagine that Trafford ever dreamed of such a thing. He kept the fortune to his own great benefit, but he has always paid regularly the allowance of the lady in Mexico. Hence he feels injured, as well as exasperated by a difficulty which has arisen."

"I hope she has plucked up spirit enough to demand her own."

"I fancy there would never have been any trouble with *her*, but there's a daughter—"

"So he cast off not only his wife but his child!"

"Be reasonable!" said Armistead a little impatiently. "What on earth could a man who has it in him to rise as Trafford has risen do with a Mexican wife?"

"If you fancy that Mexican women are uncivilized, let me tell you—"

"You don't need to tell me anything. I know

Mexico—if not as well as you do, at least pretty well. And I know that there is no country in the world where class distinctions are more marked. Well, just understand that we are not talking of the daughter of some great *hidalgo*, with a princely estate and a pedigree going back to the *conquistadores*, but of a woman from the wilds of the *Sierra Madre*, of Maya Indian blood, whose father did not even know the value of the mines he possessed,—I put it to you, as a man of the world, what could Trafford do with such a woman?"

"He could have been true to her, Maya Indian or not, especially since all his fortune is built on hers, I should say; but, then, I'm probably quixotic, if not idiotic. So go on with your story—what is the daughter going to do?"

"She holds possession of the *Santa Cruz* Mine in the name of her mother, and refuses to recognize any right of ownership in Trafford."

"Good for her!"

"Possibly; but not good for Trafford. Consequently he wants me to go down there and recover the mine."

"Do you mean to say that he is going to fight for it?"

"We hope that there will be no need to fight, although he has papers signed by the father of—ah—*Doña Beatriz*, which establish his title."

"I wonder if the father of *Doña Beatriz* knew what he was signing?"

"As you remarked a moment ago, *quien sabe?* And I may add that the question doesn't concern us."

"Isn't Trafford rich enough to leave one mine to its rightful possessor, who is also his own child?"

"You ought to know that no man, according to American ideas, is rich enough to give up anything he can hold. And there are reasons why Trafford wants and needs that mine particularly at the present time. I told you that I am just back from Puget Sound. Perhaps you've heard of the big smelter up there, owned by the Puget Sound Reduction Company? Well, Trafford is the company—at least he controls four-fifths of the stock. Now, there are several millions invested in the smelter and the railroad which has been built to some mines up in the mountains, where it was expected to obtain an unlimited supply of ore. But—this is confidential, observe—so far from being unlimited the production of these mines has proved so extremely limited that they are of very little value for supplying the smelter, which has an enormous capacity. I am just back from making an exhaustive examination of them, and when Trafford heard my report he simply said: 'We must get a supply of ore that can be depended on elsewhere or lose our investment.' Then he told me about the Santa Cruz Mine, which must be an immense property, containing the very class of ores needed."

“Hasn’t he the whole world to buy ores from for his smelter?”

“They are already buying ores from Australia, South America and Mexico; but I don’t need to point out that the profit of buying is one thing and of owning is another. Trafford has submitted for some time to the holding of the Santa Cruz Mine by the enterprising young woman in Mexico, but now that he needs the ores so badly he doesn’t intend to submit to it longer. That’s the whole case.”

“What is he going to do?”

“He is sending me to Mexico with diplomatic powers to negotiate for the recovery of the mine; and, as you can be of great assistance to me, I propose to take you along.”

“Thanks! But I don’t care to assist in such a business.”

“Nonsense!” said Armistead, sharply. “What are Trafford’s affairs to you? And you will have nothing to do with my work.”

“Why do you want me, then?”

“I want you because I suppose that you know the country thoroughly, its language, its customs, not to speak of its topography. And we may make the trip profitable in more ways than one. I have long had a fancy to go down there to pick up mining property, but have always lacked time. Now I take it for granted that you can put your hand on some good prospects—”

“On a few, perhaps.”

“Well, we can secure them together, and you know whether or not my recommendation will help to sell them.”

“I know, of course, that your recommendation will sell any thing.”

“Then don’t turn your back on the opportunity I’m offering you—an opportunity to realize a great profit from the knowledge of the country your years of prospecting in it have given you.”

“They were pretty hard years,” Lloyd admitted, “and I shouldn’t mind realizing something from them—for no man knows better than I what a country of great chances it is; but if I agree to go, you must understand that I’ll have nothing to do with robbing those women of their mine by diplomatic or other means.”

Armistead laughed.

“My dear fellow,” he said genially, “I assure you that I should never think of employing you in any diplomatic capacity. And we have no intention of using other means.”

CHAPTER II.

IN THE QUEBRADA.

THE tourist who enters Mexico in a Pullman car and rolls luxuriously along the great plateau, gazing through plate-glass windows at strange Oriental-looking cities, at vast haciendas, with leagues of fertile plain and the distant Sierra thrusting its violet peaks into a sky of dazzling sapphire, obtains many wonderful and beautiful pictures to hang in the chambers of memory; but he knows little, after all, of this old land, strange as India and fascinating as Spain. To him Mexico is a panorama of brilliant sunshine, white dusty roads, walled towns, picturesque campaniles, shadowy arcades filled with the varying tide of human life and great old churches rich with dim splendors. He does not dream that the blue rim of the distant mountain range at which he gazes—that range which stretches its mighty length along the western side of Mexico and bears alone the name of Sierra Madre—marks the outline of a world so different from that which surrounds him that it might well belong to another hemisphere. It is a great world of towering heights and majestic forests, of rushing streams and stupendous gorges, where for hundreds of miles the only

roads are trails; where since the foundation of the earth no wheel has ever rolled; where even the passes are ten thousand feet above the sea, and where in all the wide solitudes Nature reigns supreme, with a wild beauty, a charm of infinite freshness such as can be found but seldom now on this old, man-trodden globe.

In this region the traveller journeys on horseback or muleback, instead of in Pullman cars; and if he approaches it from the western coast, he soon finds himself among heights broken into deep chasms or gorges, down which the rivers rush from their birthplace in the clouds to their grave in the vast Pacific. It is by these tremendous clefts, well named in the Spanish tongue *quebradas* (broken), that those who seek the upper world of the great Sierra, journey, and, once entered between their walls, the wild, almost terrible grandeur, of the way increases with every onward league. But although the mountains are riven apart, as if by some awful convulsion of Nature, and tall cliffs tower in austere majesty above the narrow pass, filled with the sound of roaring, tumbling waters, as the stream which holds sovereignty there pours its torrents over, under and around the rocks of every conceivable form and color which lie piled in fantastic masses in the bottom of the gorge, there is no desolation in this strange, beautiful quebrada world. On the contrary, the moisture of the river pouring downward, and of the clouds sailing in from the

ocean, creates a wealth of verdure, as delightful as it is rare in a sun-parched land. Immense trees spread their wide, green boughs over flashing water; the great shoulders of the hills are clothed with luxuriant woods, and the small dwellings of primitive construction which now and again stand on knolls, sufficiently elevated to be secure from rising water, are completely embowered in shade, generally that of magnificent orange trees.

The inhabitants of these dwellings are much in evidence, passing up and down the quebrada, the men with white cotton *calzones* rolled to their hips, leaving their brown, sinewy legs entirely bare; and the women with skirts kilted above their slender ankles and small feet, for the purpose of wading across the tumultuous, but in the dry season mostly shallow water. These pedestrians alternate with long trains of pack-mules, bearing burdens of all kinds, from bales of merchandise to bars of silver bullion from the mines in the mountains above, or sacks filled with freshly coined dollars from the mint of Culiacan; with trains of diminutive burros, also pack-laden, and with horsemen who seem to have ridden booted and spurred out of another and more picturesque age.

It was high in the quebrada of the Tamezula River that a party of travellers journeying upward halted one day for the noon rest. There were in the party as many mules and men as usually accompany persons of importance in these regions, but

several features of the outfit would have struck the native eye as unusual and significant of *gringos*, that is to say, of foreigners. For one thing, three or four of the mules carried on their *aparejos* large, square modern trunks, such as are seldom used by Mexicans; others were loaded with boxes bearing signs of ocean freight, and to complete the note of strangeness one pack consisted of a tent, which is an article almost unknown in Mexico, even in the army.

This tent was not erected at present, however. It lay on the ground with the rest of the packs, while the animals took their feed by the side of the stream, just here swirling over its rocks with some approach to tranquillity and the *mozos* lay near them in various recumbent attitudes, their *zorapes* making bright bits of color against the gray rocks and amid the varied greens of the abounding verdure. A few yards distant a different group reclined under the shade of one of the great trees which abound here—a group consisting of a middle-aged man, two younger men and a lady, the latter youthful and extremely pretty, with an indefinable air of the world in her appearance which contrasted piquantly with the wild picturesqueness of her surroundings.

Not that it should be supposed that she was not attired with perfect appropriateness to these surroundings. It was the very perfection of her costume with regard to time and place, of the well-cut habit, fitted as if moulded to the lines of the slender

figure, with its skirt short enough to show the trimly-booted foot, and the practical simplicity of the hat of soft, gray felt and veil of silvery tissue, which marked her difference from the women to be met now and then on the road wrapped to the eyes in their *rebozos*, sitting in saddles like arm-chairs; helpless, ungraceful masses of drapery, strikingly suggestive of the woman of the Oriental countries. This was a type of the modern woman, not only ready to go anywhere and do anything which duty or inclination demanded, but knowing with a perfect instinct and taste how to carry the charm of her sex with her even into ways of adventure and places of hardship.

For to say that Isabel Rivers possessed the poise of the ordinary American girl—great as that undoubtedly is—would be to state inadequately the fact that she was a subtle combination of girl and woman of the world, which is a combination as unusual as it is attractive. Youth, even when most carefully trained and passed through the best moulds, is generally crude, but there had never been any crudeness about Miss Rivers. Those who remembered her as a slim, brilliant-eyed child, with even then a remarkable charm of intelligence and distinction, were not surprised that after certain unusual advantages of education, travel and life, she had become one of those exceptional women whose power of attraction is not limited to men, but whom all classes of humanity find fascinating.

That the two young men now lying at her feet as she sat enthroned between the gnarled roots of the tree—Thornton, a graduate of Columbia, sighing for the flesh-pots of New York, and Mackenzie, a young Mexicanized Scotchman—found her so, was patent to the most superficial observation. It is likely that under any circumstances this would have been the case; but when, after long social exile in the wilds of the Sierra Madre, they met their chief in Culiacan, on his return from the States, accompanied by this captivating daughter, there was only one result possible; and that result achieved itself, to employ a French idiom, in the shortest possible time. It was a result which surprised no one. Mr. Rivers, accustomed to seeing men bowled over like nine-pins by his daughter's charms, regarded the speedy and complete subjugation of his staff with the indifference with which we regard the usual and the expected; while to Isabel Rivers herself homage had long since become merely the atmosphere in which she was accustomed to live and move. Regarded superficially at least, this had not spoiled her. In manner, she was delightfully simple; with an exquisite quality of human sympathy, to which was owing a large part of her charm.

At present it was evident that she was less interested in her two admirers than in the surpassing picturesqueness of the scenes around her. For two days she had been riding in a state of constantly in-

creasing admiration through the deep gorge, her eyes shining with delight behind the silvery folds of her veil, as the wild loveliness of the way opened before her.

"I could never have imagined that there was anything in the world so beautiful, which was not also famous," she was saying now, as she glanced from towering rock to flashing water. "People cross oceans and continents to see things less wonderful; but I doubt if any one, outside of the people who live here, ever heard of this."

"You may be quite sure," said Thornton, "that no one ever did. And we who live here don't, as a rule, go into raptures over the quebrada; eh, MacKenzie?"

Mackenzie shook his head.

"Our sentiments concerning it can be pretty much summed up in the opinion of the arrieros—*muy mala la quebrada!*" he said. "Of course," looking around dispassionately, "one knows that it is very picturesque, and—er—"

"Sublime, grand, wildly beautiful,—those are the adjectives appropriate to the quebrada," Thornton prompted patronizingly.

"There's another still more appropriate, and that is rough—in the superlative degree," said Mr. Rivers. "If we could only get a railroad in here—"

"Papa, the suggestion is a sacrilege!"

"Sacrilege or not, my dear, it is a thing I should like amazingly to see; and so would everyone else,

except the freighters who are making fortunes out of our necessities. Think of the increased profits in our ore heaps if we had cheap freight to the ocean!" he went on, addressing his subordinates. "And, by the by, have I told you that I've some hope of seeing a railroad here?"

"No!" said Thornton, with quick interest.
"How?"

"I heard in San Francisco that the Puget Sound Reduction Company want ores, and that they are coming into this country after them. I am inclined to believe there is truth in the report because I met Armistead, who is Trafford's expert, in Guaymas, and he told me he expected to see me in Tópia. Now, if those people come into these mountains and buy mines they will build a railroad at once—no freighting with mules for eight months, and being tied up by high water in the quebrada during four, for them!"

"Not much!" Thornton agreed. "Armistead!" he added, reminiscently. "It's astonishing how that fellow has succeeded. We were in the same class in the Mining School, and I don't remember that he displayed any particular talent. It's all a matter of getting the confidence of the capitalists and syndicates; but how did he manage it?"

"Generally managed through personal influence and connection," said Mr. Rivers, who knew whereof he spoke. "Lloyd is with him," he added carelessly.

"He couldn't get a better guide for the Sierra," said Thornton. "Lloyd knows it thoroughly. He will do the work, and Armistead will get the credit."

"That's how it generally is," said Mackenzie, in the tone of one disgusted by the ways of an unsatisfactory world.

Miss Rivers regarded the speakers meditatively with her beautiful eyes, which were of a golden brown tint, and singularly expressive.

"I remember those men—we talked with them one evening in the patio of the hotel," she said. "They struck me very differently."

"They couldn't possibly have struck you otherwise," said Thornton. "They *are* very different; so different that their conjunction is rather odd. I like Lloyd."

Miss Rivers smiled.

"The inference is plain. Well, I too liked Lloyd—if he was the tall, sunburnt one; but if they are on their way to bring a railroad into this marvellous quebrada, I hope they will both be lost."

"It's possible that they may be—they were going to visit some mines in the mountains of Sonora, where the Yaquis are pretty troublesome just now," said Mr. Rivers. "But if they aren't lost, they were to follow us by the next steamer."

"In that case they'll be along soon," observed Mackenzie; "for I heard the day we left Culiacan that the *Mazatlan* had arrived at Altata."

"If they leave Culiacan promptly and ride fast

they may overtake us," said Mr. Rivers; "for our progress since we entered the quebrada has been more loitering than travelling."

"I call it perfect," said his daughter. "Nothing could be more charming than such loitering along such a way. I am so glad I came with you, papa! I have never enjoyed anything more in my life."

"I hope you will remain in that frame of mind, my dear," remarked Mr. Rivers, a little sceptically. "But it is barely possible that six months in Tópia may prove something of a strain even to your love of novelty and the picturesque; and since the quebrada becomes impassable when the rains begin, it will be at least that long before you can get away."

"I shall not want to get away," she declared. "I feel as if I were going into some wild and wonderful fastness of Nature, far and high in the hills, with the gateway closing behind me."

"That's exactly what you are doing," said MacKenzie, practically; "for when the river rises the gate is certainly closed. Nobody goes up and down the quebrada then. But here comes Lucio at last to say that lunch is ready."

"*Ya está la comida, Señorita,*" said Lucio—who was a slim young Mexican, attired in the national costume,—approaching the group.

They gathered around the provision chest, on the flat top of which a rather elaborate repast, considering time and place, had been arranged. It was all delightfully gypsy-like; and as Isabel Rivers

sat on a great stone, while she ate her chicken and tongue and drank her California claret, with a canopy of green leaves rustling overhead and the crystal river swirling by over its stones, her face expressed her delight in the eloquent fashion some faces have.

“Like a picnic?” she said in reply to a suggestion of Thornton’s. “Not in the least. A picnic is merely playing at what we are doing. This is the real thing—the thing for which I have always longed—to go away and live for a time remote from what we call civilization, in the heart of Nature. And here we have not only the heart of Nature but an Oriental, Arabian-Nights-like charm in all our surroundings. Look at that now!” she lifted her hand and pointed. “Doesn’t it take one back any number of centuries? And *could* anything be more picturesque?”

Her companions turned their heads, following with their glances the direction of the pointing hand, just as a train of horsemen and pack-mules came splashing across the ford below them. They made, as Miss Rivers said, a strikingly picturesque effect, and one altogether in keeping with the wild scenery of the quebrada. At the head of the train rode a group consisting of three men, dressed as Mexican caballeros dress for the road: in high boots of yellow leather, breeches, and braided jacket of cloth or buckskin, and broad sombreros, with their silver-mounted trappings glittering in the sunlight, and a woman, who sat her horse in better fashion

than most of the feminine equestrians who travel in these regions, but whose costume lacked the perfect adaptability to its purpose of that of her male companions. It was, in fact, extremely ungraceful; for she wore simply a riding-skirt over her ordinary dress; and above a blue *rebozo*, wound like an Eastern yashmak around her head and neck and partly covering her face, a sombrero of rough straw.

“By Jove!” said Mr. Rivers, “that’s the *conducta* of the Santa Cruz Mine; and there’s the Gerente, Don Mariano Vallejo himself.”

He rose as he spoke and went quickly forward as, with jingling spurs, the cavalcade came riding toward them.

“Don Mariano!” he cried. “*Como le va Usted?*”

“A—h, Don Roberto!” exclaimed Don Mariano, in a high key of pleasure and surprise.

He sprang from his horse, and threw his arm around Mr. Rivers, who promptly returned the embrace. They patted each other cordially on the shoulder; and then the Mexican, drawing back, regarded the other with a smile. He was a bronze-faced, gray-haired man of much dignity of appearance and bearing, with a lean, muscular figure, strongly marked features and eagle-like glance.

“*Me alegro mucho de verle á Vd.*,” he said. “*Cuando volvió Vd.?*”

“I returned a few days ago,” Mr. Rivers answered (also in Spanish); “and I am on my way up to Tópia, with my daughter. And you?”

"I have been down to Culiacan, to lay in supplies for the mine and mill before the rainy season," Don Mariano replied; "and I am returning now with the *conducta*."

"What is the amount of your *conducta* this month?"

"Thirty thousand dollars. It is not bad."

"It is very good. I wish the Caridad would do as well. But whom have you with you—your daughter?"

"No." Don Mariano turned toward the feminine figure in the shrouding *rebozo*. "This is Doña Victoria Calderon, the daughter of the owner of the Santa Cruz Mine."

Mr. Rivers acknowledged the introduction in a manner which gratified his own daughter's sense of the appropriate, and then suggested that the party should halt and take lunch with his own.

Generally speaking, Mexicans are as ready to accept as to offer hospitality, so Don Mariano immediately replied that they would be happy to accept the invitation of his gracious and highly esteemed friend. There was a general dismounting, and while one of the group communicated the order to the rest of the train behind them, the others advanced to the shady spot where Miss Rivers and her companions rose to receive them.

CHAPTER III.

DOÑA VICTORIA.

THE Mexican girl took off her sombrero and threw back her *rebozo* as she came under the thick, spreading shade of the giant tree. The dusky blue folds of the scarf lay around her neck and enhanced the picturesqueness of the head rising above it.

“What a magnificent creature!” Miss Rivers whispered to Thornton, and indeed the adjective was the only one which could fitly be applied to Victoria Calderon. She was tall, vigorous, supple yet straight as an arrow, and any one familiar with the fine type of the Mayas, who are the original race inhabiting this region, would have recognized their traits in her length of limb, her stately bearing, and the free grace of her movements. Her head, now covered only with the abundant masses of her curling black hair, was set on a neck the lines of which would have delighted the eye of an artist; and her face, with its fine straight features, its large dark eyes under strongly marked brows, and its skin of creamy softness, was more than handsome. There was no trace of shyness in her manner. She returned Miss Rivers’ salutation in a voice full of ex-

quisite modulations while her gaze dwelt on the American girl with a scrutiny of the frankest curiosity.

It was a very striking contrast which the young women made, as they sat down together—the loveliness of the one, so delicate, elusive, changeful, brilliant, so stamped like her dress with the fashion of the world; the beauty of the other belonging to the heroic order of classic sculpture and primitive races,—a type altogether in harmony with the scenes around them and suggestive of all things fresh and sylvan. It was natural that there should have been little conversation between them at first; but after dinner was over, and the men of the party stretched themselves out comfortably, with their cigars and cigarettes, to talk ores, Miss Rivers invited her companion to share her seat among the great roots, and proceeded to sound the gulf which she felt instinctively lay between them. Her Spanish was sufficient for practical conversational purposes, and she smiled a little as she found herself beginning a very direct catechism.

“You live beyond here, in the Sierra, do you not?” she asked.

“Yes, señorita,” Victoria replied, with discouraging brevity.

“Not in a town like Tópia, to which we are going?”

“No, señorita. My home is ten leagues from Canelas, which is the town nearest to us. We are in the midst of the Sierra—*pura Sierra*.”

“Do you not find it very lonely?”

The girl looked surprised.

“I have never known any other life, and there is always much to do,” she said.

“Surely not much for you to do?”

“For me, certainly. It is I who order everything on the hacienda and at the mine.”

“You!” It was an exclamation of astonishment which Miss Rivers could not restrain, but Victoria regarded her with the same calm simplicity.

“For my mother,” she explained.

“But”—the other hesitated an instant—“have you no men related to you to relieve you of such work?”

“Don Mariano yonder is our cousin, and he is the *administrador* of the property; but he takes his orders from us—that is, from me.”

Miss Rivers glanced at the bronzed, middle-aged man to whom at this moment her father was listening with an air of deference as he talked, gesticulating with a slender brown hand, holding a cigarette in its fingers. When her gaze returned to the girl beside her, there was incredulity mingled with its wonder.

“It is very strange!” she said involuntarily. “You are very young.”

“Yes,” Victoria answered, as one who acknowledges an undeniable disadvantage. “But I shall grow older.”

"There is no doubt of that," Isabel laughed. "But, as a rule, women don't look forward with pleasure to growing older. And meanwhile what good do you have of your youth—which is the season of enjoyment?"

"What good do I have of my youth?" the Mexican girl repeated in a puzzled tone. "Why, all the good possible. What more should I want?"

Evidently the gulf was very deep—deeper than she had imagined, Isabel thought. She paused before making another sounding.

"You have no society," she said at length.

"Oh, yes, we have society!" Victoria replied quickly. "We go to Tópia and to Canelas for the *fiestas*. And our friends come to see us."

"But that can not be all! You sometimes go away from the Sierra—you travel, perhaps?"

The other shook her head.

"No, we never go away," she answered. "We were born in the Sierra. Our home and our property are there. Why should we go away?"

"Why?" Miss Rivers found herself guilty of the futility of attempting to enlighten the ignorance which could ask such a question. "To see the world, to educate yourself by travel, to enlarge your knowledge of men and things, to enjoy life while you are young, and—and, oh, for many things!"

She ended abruptly, for a change came over the face before her. It grew cold, grave, almost repellent.

"My mother went away once," the girl said; "and she has told me that it was terrible as death, her longing to return to the Sierra. Nothing would take her away again. And I—I know, too, what it is to go away. I was sent once to Durango that I might go to school, but I pined so that they thought I would die, and they were forced to send me back to the Sierra. It is so that we who have our home there feel."

"I have heard of such feelings," said Miss Rivers slowly. She thought of the Swiss soldiers in foreign lands, dying of homesickness for their high green valleys and snowy peaks, their pure, clear mountain air. Was it strange that this daughter of the Sierra, nurtured amid the wild beauty which had power so deeply to impress even a stranger, could not live away from the great heights, could not feel anything worth gaining which was to be bought at the price of exile from them? There is nothing of what is called civilization in such a feeling. It is, on the contrary, one of the deepest, as one of the strongest instincts of primitive men, which civilization is doing its utmost to obliterate, and, as a rule, it only survives among simple and secluded people. In such form as this Isabel Rivers, a modern of the moderns herself, had never before encountered it, and her interest was deeply stirred. She possessed—it was indeed the great secret of her charm—that exquisite quality of sympathy to which "nothing that is human is strange";

and just now she felt strongly inclined to make a thorough, sympathetic study of this, to her, new type,—this girl, with the form of a Greek goddess and the eyes of a woodland fawn, of whom in a deeper than the Wordsworthian sense it might be truly said that Nature had made “a lady of her own.”

“It is not strange,” she observed gently, after a moment’s silence, “that you should be strongly attached to anything so wonderfully beautiful as this country of yours. I, who have only just entered it, feel its fascination already. I am afraid that all other scenery will seem tame to me hereafter.”

It was now Victoria’s turn to show incredulity.

“Do you mean that you like the quebrada?” she asked.

“Like it!” Miss Rivers called up all her Spanish to enable her to express her sentiments. “It is the most marvellous, the most wildly beautiful thing I have ever seen!” she declared. “The journey through it would alone repay me for coming to Mexico.”

“How strange!” said the Mexican girl wonderingly. “Our ladies all dread the quebrada and find it terrible to travel here. They would rather stay down in the *tierra caliente* through all the heat than come up to the Sierra by this way. And you—a *gringa*—you like it!”

Miss Rivers smiled.

"I like it because I have been so differently brought up," she said. "Modern women—some of us at least—enjoy adventure and hardship and many things which women used to shrink from. I am not one of those who carry this to an extreme—who like, for example, to share their sports with men,—but I like all things wild and fresh and picturesque and out of the beaten way; and the quebrada is all of that, you know."

"But you look so—so fine," the other persisted, her eyes still fastened in wonder on the face and figure before her. "I could never have imagined you would care for such things. When I saw you I wondered what you were doing here, and I thought how disgusted you must be."

"Well, you see you should not judge by appearances. I may look fine as you say; but if I could not, perhaps, endure as much hardship as you can, I am sure that I would enjoy all that I could endure. If we are going to travel up the quebrada together you will see."

"We shall travel together until to-morrow, and then our ways separate. We will take the quebrada which goes to Canelas, and you will go on to Tópia."

"There are different quebradas, then?"

"Surely. Every stream has its own quebrada; but most of them come into this, because it is the quebrada of the Tamezula, the largest river in our part of the Sierra."

“Miss Rivers”—it was Thornton’s voice speaking beside her,—“your mule is ready for you. We are about to start. And what do you think of the heiress of the Sierra?” he asked a moment later, as he put her into her saddle. “I have been watching your efforts to make conversation, and felt very sorry for you. I know how hard it is to talk to these women.”

“Your sorrow was unnecessary,” said Isabel, as she took her reins. “I have been very much interested, and I am going to delve farther into the nature and experience of Doña—what is her name?”

“Victoria. It is regal enough to suit her, isn’t it?”

“I did not know that it was a Spanish name.”

“Oh, yes! quite ordinary; and the masculine form, Victorio, still more so.”

“Well, I find Doña Victoria not only interesting, but (to me) an entirely original type. Don’t be surprised if I devote myself to her exclusively until we separate.”

“Oh, but I say!—you don’t really mean to do that?”

“I really and certainly do. Why, it is a chance I would not miss for anything. She belongs to the country, she is a product of its influences, she is in every respect a child of the Sierra—”

“And, therefore, she hasn’t three ideas in common with you.”

“But I don’t want people who have ideas in com-

mon with me. I want people who can give me something new, fresh, original. There she is, mounted and about to start. Good-bye! I am going to join her."

"Well, I'm—blessed!" Thornton said to himself, as he fell back and watched Miss Rivers ride sharply forward. There seemed nothing else to say in presence of a taste so eccentric as that which could prefer to himself and the opportunity to converse agreeably about social events "at home," and people whom they both knew, a Mexican girl, ignorant of everything that anybody could possibly care to talk about. There was only one explanation, however, which quickly occurred to his mind.

"Miss Rivers wants to improve her Spanish," he said, turning to Mackenzie, who came up just then; "so she is cultivating the lady of the Santa Cruz. Fortunately, the quebrada does not admit of two people riding together very long, and we have to be thankful that she hasn't taken a fancy to a Mexican man!"

CHAPTER IV.

AT GUASIMILLAS.

NIGHT was fast closing down on the quebrada; but the two horsemen, followed by a *mozo* and pack-mule, who found themselves deep amid its wildest scenes, could perceive no sign of the shelter which they had expected to make. All day they had been riding, with heights of savage grandeur towering higher and higher above them; with the unceasing roar of rushing, falling water in their ears; with the rock-strewn way growing constantly rougher as the mountains drew nearer together, until the pass became no more than a narrow, winding defile, which constantly seemed to come to an end in the face of some tremendous, jutting cliff. Both men were well accustomed to hardship, but they had ridden with little rest since early morning. They were tired, and conscious of tired animals under them; they were wet from continual fording of the stream, where even the most careful rider and sure-footed mule were likely at any moment to find themselves in a deep hole among the rocks over which the torrent foamed; and, besides being tired and wet, they were extremely hungry. Under these circumstances it was not surprising that patience

finally began to appear somewhat less than a virtue.

"I thought I knew something of rough country," Armistead remarked; "but this exceeds anything I've ever seen. And this trail we are following is called a road, I suppose!"

"Why not?" Lloyd asked. "Why shouldn't it be the King's Highway—*el camino real*—if it likes? It's all the highway there is."

"I've been expecting it to turn into a squirrel track and run up a tree, but I begin to think now that it's we who are up the tree. What are we going to do if we can't make this place we are looking for?"

"We must make it; for there's no other place where we can get anything for our animals to eat."

"And how much farther do you think we have to go?"

"Probably a league."

"A league! Why you told me this morning it was only ten or twelve leagues from the place where we spent the night!"

"So it was, but you have learned what leagues are like in the quebrada; and we took a pretty long noon rest, you remember."

Armistead did remember, and, having had much experience in wild places and rough countries, said nothing more. So they rode on in silence for some time, while the strip of sky far above their heads, which during the day had burned with the blue fire of a jewel, now took a tender violet tint; while the stars—wonderfully large and golden in these high

tropical altitudes—began to look down on them. In the depths of the great earth-rift twilight passes into night even more quickly than elsewhere; and the outlines of rocks and trees began to assume a certain indistinctness, while the voice of the river seemed to take a higher note as it poured downward over its rocks. A wonderful Alpine freshness came into the air, together with a thousand wild perfumes and scent of green, growing things.

Presently Armistead spoke again.

“I shouldn’t be surprised if we came upon the Rivers party at this Guasi—whatever the name of the place is. You know they told us at Tamezula that the Gerente of the Caridad and his party had passed up the quebrada just before us.”

“If they maintain their distance in advance of us, instead of being at Guasimillas, they ought to reach Tópia to-night.”

“You forget that Miss Rivers is with them. It’s not possible with a woman to make such day’s marches as we have made. I’ll wager a good deal we find them at this place.”

“The hope ought to put fresh spirit into you, then, if not into your mule. I observe that you are much interested in Miss Rivers.”

“Who wouldn’t be interested in her? Do you know that she is perhaps the most admired girl in California?”

“I didn’t know it, but I haven’t much trouble in believing it. She has ‘a way with her,’ as the Irish

say, that tends toward fascination. Even a case-hardened chap like myself is conscious of it."

"Oddly enough, I never met her until we ran across them the other day at Guaymas," Armistead went on. "It's a queer whim that brings her to this country—a girl with the world, so to speak, at her feet and hosts of admirers and friends all over America and Europe,—but rare good luck for me. It's positively amazing"—Lloyd was by this time accustomed to the note of self-complacency in the voice—"how my luck holds!"

"You consider the presence of Miss Rivers here as a proof of it?"

"Of course. Any one might see that the presence of such a woman in such a place lends a flavor to life it would otherwise lack; and equally, of course, the thing works the other way also."

"You mean that your presence will lend a flavor to life for Miss Rivers?"

"I shouldn't put it exactly that way, but necessarily she will appreciate a man out of her own world more when she meets him here than if she met him at home."

"No doubt,"—the assent was sincere, if a little dry. "Things do arrange themselves well for your benefit, one must confess."

"Always!" Armistead agreed, with the satisfaction which a prosperous man finds it hard to suppress, and which other men, especially the less prosperous, are likely to find so irritating. "Things never

fail to come my way just at the time I want them, and I have a pretty strong impression that they will continue to do so."

Lloyd made no response to this confident forecast, but as they rode on in the starlight a dim memory of old classic stories and ancient superstitions came to him. He thought of the Greek king casting his most precious jewel into the sea to propitiate the gods who had overwhelmed him with continued good fortune and avert the inevitable hour of disaster. There seemed a certain absurdity in associating these memories with the man beside him, typical product of the hard, material, modern world. Yet, if the ancient gods are dead, who knows better than the man of to-day, whose only god after himself is Luck, that this strange power or influence, on which no one can confidently reckon, may change in a moment, and that to fight against it is like swimming against the ocean tide? Sooner or later such a luckless swimmer goes under and is heard of no more. It was possible that in the great Sierra, towering in austere majesty before them, failure was awaiting this man who so confidently boasted of never having known it; and who by such boast, an old Greek would have believed, incurred the certain withdrawal of the fortune in which he trusted. This was the thought which flitted across Lloyd's mind, as if inspired by the ceaseless chant of the river beside them, or by the mystery of the night, so full of the suggestion

of ancient memories. But he held his peace; and presently, just as his keen eye caught something like the gleam of a star in the depths of the gorge ahead of them, the *mozo* behind spoke:

“Look, señor! Yonder is Guasimillas.”

“So it is,” Lloyd said to Armistead. “We’re all right now.”

As they rode on, splashing across still another ford, the light enlarged rapidly, and they soon perceived that it was a camp-fire, around which a considerable number of men and mules were gathered.

“The Rivers party!” Armistead said.

“No,” Lloyd disagreed. “That is not likely to be so large. What train is this?” he asked of one of the men around the fire.

“The *conducta* of the Santa Cruz Mine, señor,” the man replied.

“Talking of coincidences, what do you think of that?” Lloyd asked, as they rode onward. “The *conducta*—that is, the bullion-train—of the Santa Cruz Mine! What particular phase of your good luck do you consider this meeting an indication of?”

“Of the phase that I shall probably be directing the next trip it makes,” Armistead answered, with a laugh. “But I thought we had reached our destination.”

“So we have: here’s the house.”

They rode under the overhanging shade of trees, and dismounted before a house of more pretension than most of the quebrada residences; an adobe

structure, with a long, partially enclosed corridor in front, instead of the usual *ramada*. In this corridor one or two lamps were burning; a table, covered with a cloth and bearing some dishes, stood; while various figures, both masculine and feminine, were moving about; and as the newcomers rode up a middle-aged man came forward to meet them.

“Ah, Don Pablo!—*como está Vd.?*” said Lloyd, putting out his hand.

It was dark under the trees, but Don Pablo knew the voice.

“It is Don Felipe!” he announced, delightedly. “Don Felipe himself! A thousand welcomes, señor. I knew you would come back, although you told us you were going away to stay.”

“Yes, I am back,” Lloyd answered. “And you are well? and Doña Maria? and all the family? Good! This is my friend, Señor Armistead,—another Americano. You can give us food for ourselves and our horses—*pronto?*”

“All that I have is yours, señor, and you shall be served as soon as possible; but there are many people here to-night, and my wife and daughter have their hands full.”

“Who are the people?”

“The Gerente of the Caridad, with a party, señor; and the *administrador* of the Santa Cruz, with his *condúcta*.”

“We passed the *condúcta* out yonder, and—but what is that?”

"It is the ladies in *huerta*, señor, singing."

"The ladies?"

"Doña Victoria Calderon and the daughter of the Gerente of the Caridad."

Lloyd turned to his companion.

"Do you hear that?" he asked.

"The singing? Certainly," Armistead answered.

"What does he say about it?"

"He says that the singers are Miss Rivers and Doña Victoria Calderon."

"Doña—who?"

"The daughter of the owner of the Santa Cruz Mine,—if you understand that better."

Armistead stared.

"You don't mean it!" he said.

"It does seem like overdoing the coincidence business," Lloyd admitted. "But since things always turn up when you want them, and it's to be supposed that you want Doña Victoria, she has only followed the rule in obligingly turning up."

"Rather prematurely," Armistead returned. "I could have waited for the pleasure of meeting her; but, after all, I suppose it *is* a lucky accident. She doesn't know who I am or why I'm here, and this meeting will give me a chance to study her a little. We'll wash our faces and join them."

A little later they came upon a pretty scene in the *huerta*. The aspect of this charming place—a grove of orange-trees, forming delightful vistas for the eye, all green and gold in daylight and full of

shadowy mystery at night—had so enchanted Miss Rivers that she insisted upon her tent being pitched here. A moon but little past the full was now risen over the heights and poured its radiance into the quebrada, showing every fold of the great hills, flashing on the swift current of the crystal river, and making a fairy lace-work of silvery lights and black shadows in the wide alleys of the *huerta*. The white canvas of the tent shone like snow under the broad boughs of glossy foliage; and before its door, over which a Moorish lantern hung, with the light gleaming jewel-like through ruby glass, a group was gathered in various easy attitudes—Miss Rivers, Doña Victoria, Thornton and Mackenzie, on bright-colored blankets and cushions; Mr. Rivers and Don Mariano a little withdrawn to one side, and more sedately seated on chairs brought from the house.

Lloyd and Armistead, as they approached under the trees, paused at sight of this group; struck not so much by its general picturesqueness as by the central figure on which the moonlight fell most broadly,—the figure of the Mexican girl, who, as she sat in the lustrous radiance, with a guitar in her hands, seemed endowed with a beauty altogether marvellous. She was singing at the moment, and what she sang was “*La Golondrina*,”—that sweetest and saddest of Spanish airs, the very cry of an exile’s broken heart:

Adonde ira, veloz y fatigada,
La golondrina que de aqui se va,
O si en el viento se hallará estraviada
Buscando abrigo y no lo encontrará.

There was a pause, in which no one stirred; and then, like honey dropping from the honeycomb, the low, rich notes fell again on the listener's ears:

Ave querida, amada peregrina,
Mi corazon al tuyo estrecharé
Oiré tu canto, tierna golondrina,
Recordaré mi patria y lloraré.

With a cadence full of tenderness and pathos, the voice died into silence over the last words; and after a moment it was Miss Rivers who spoke:

"I never heard those words of 'La Golondrina' before. They are exquisite. And one might fancy that you had been an exile like Aben-Hamed in the other version, señorita,—you sing them so feelingly."

"I have been enough of an exile to understand them, señorita," Victoria answered, in a voice almost as musical as her singing tones; "but I learned these words from my mother, who has felt all that they express."

"Why, Lloyd—Armistead!" Mr. Rivers suddenly perceived the two figures now advancing from the shadows. "So you two fellows *have* caught up with us!"

"It hasn't been very hard to do," Lloyd remarked as they shook hands. "Your progression seems to have been most leisurely."

"Why not? Haven't we left the Land of Hurry behind? Isabel, you remember Mr. Armistead and Mr. Lloyd? And we have some Mexican friends with us. Lloyd, you know Don Mariano Vallejo,

of course? Don Mariano,"—lapsing into Spanish—"let me introduce Mr. Armistead, a distinguished mining expert from the States, come to examine the mineral resources of your country in the interests of capitalists. And this is the Señorita Doña Victoria Calderon. Doña Victoria, these señores Americanos desire to place themselves at your feet."

It was all over presently—the hand-shaking, bowing, compliments; and the señores Americanos dropped into their places,—Armistead by the side of Miss Rivers, and Lloyd near Thornton, who expressed his pleasure at seeing him again.

"I was afraid you had grown disgusted and left us," he said. "I'm glad to see you haven't. There are great chances here, once this region is opened up; and you have spent too much time in the Sierra to let other men come in and win the prizes."

"They are likely to do that any way," Lloyd answered. "I have long since made up my mind that I'm one of the unlucky dogs of the world, who win no prizes."

"It's your own fault if you are—but it doesn't look like it just now. To have got hold of Trafford's expert is pretty good luck."

"The boot is on the other leg—he has got hold of me."

"Whichever leg it is on, you can make use of him, can't you? He's here to look up mines, isn't he?"

"To some extent,"

“Oh, I’m not asking you to violate confidence! One knows the mystery in which these gilt-edged experts enwrap their business. Diplomatists settling the affairs of nations aren’t in it with them. Some day I intend to begin to put on such airs myself. It seems the only road to success.”

“Don’t begin yet. You are too good a fellow to be spoiled. And really Armistead doesn’t put on the airs to which you allude to any offensive extent. But tell me how things are going with you, and how you come to be with these people of the Santa Cruz?”

“Purely by accident. They came up with us at the noon rest to-day, and we’ve travelled together since. I wish they were—elsewhere.”

“Why?”

“Well, Miss Rivers has taken a great fancy to Doña Victoria, and devotes all her attention to her. This makes things rather tiresome for the rest of us.”

“Meaning Mackenzie and yourself,—I see. But Mac is putting in his time very well just now, and the girl is magnificently handsome.”

Thornton glanced at Doña Victoria and Mackenzie, who were talking together.

“She’s handsome certainly—to anybody who likes the style,” he agreed temperately. “As for Mackenzie, he’s more of a Mexican than anything else, and always gets on with these people. She’s a great

heiress, you know. Her mother's the sole owner of the Santa Cruz Mine."

"Ah!"

"Rather a remarkable young woman for a Mexican," Thornton continued. "Manages the business herself and does it uncommonly well. Even gives orders to Don Mariano yonder, who looks as if he could take President Diaz's job with credit to himself; and who is as shrewd as he looks, judging from our business experience with him. We part with them to-morrow, I'm glad to say. How about Armistead and yourself? You are going on to Tópia, I suppose?"

"The cordiality of the supposition is so great that I regret not being able to say positively that we are, but we may go instead to Canelas. There's some property in that neighborhood we wish to look at."

"Then you'll travel with the Santa Cruz party, no doubt?"

"Possibly—if we like to do so."

"Oh, I should think you'd like! Doña Victoria, as you've said, is tremendously handsome, and the Santa Cruz Mine is the best ore-producer in this part of the Sierra."

"I fail to see the connection."

"Many men would see it quickly enough. The time has been when Armistead would, but I suppose he's too prosperous now for that sort of thing. But, prosperous or not"—and the speaker rose with

an air of determination,—“I don’t see why he should be permitted to monopolize Miss Rivers, and I’m going to join them. Will you come?”

Lloyd looked at the girl who was talking to Armistead. Had he never seen her before he would have felt attracted by the charm, irresistible as magnetism, which her presence diffused. But as it chanced he, too, had talked with her under the stars in the patio of the hotel at Guaymas, he knew by personal experience the delightfulness of her companionship; and he was conscious, therefore, of a temptation to share, even with others, in the conversation, so sweet, so gay, so full of that quick comprehension and sympathy which is the fine flower of culture. But duty intervened. As they were entering the *huerta*, Armistead had said:

“You know my Spanish isn’t good enough for conversational purposes, so I wish you would cultivate the Santa Cruz young woman. Try to find out, as far as possible, what kind of person she is.”

“I didn’t engage for diplomatic service,” Lloyd reminded him.

“But you engaged to do my talking, and this is a case where it’s very important that it should be done,” Armistead responded impatiently. “I’d like to exchange some of my French and German for a little Spanish just now; but, since that isn’t possible, I must use yours—and I want the benefit of all the brains you have in the bargain.”

It was the recollection of this which moved Lloyd when, in reply to Thornton's last words, he answered, a little reluctantly:

"Thanks!—no. Miss Rivers will be quite sufficiently monopolized with yourself and Armistead. I believe I'll join Mackenzie and cultivate the heiress of the Santa Cruz."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE ORANGE TREES.

THAT Mackenzie was quite ready to resign his place by the heiress of the Santa Cruz became apparent as soon as Lloyd approached them. He rose with alacrity, commending the newcomer to Doña Victoria's consideration, and then himself made haste to join the group around Miss Rivers.

Lloyd looked after him with a slight smile; and the smile was still on his lips when his glance returned to the Mexican girl, as she sat on her Oriental-like pile of cushions, with the Moorish lantern hanging from the end of the ridge-pole of the tent above her head. These accessories—fragments of the modern craze for things Eastern and bizarre,—which had been brought by Miss Rivers for purposes of decoration, seemed here to lose their note of strangeness, and to fit into the scene as perfectly as the Hispano-Moresque architecture of the country, or the ancient lamps of wrought-iron swinging in so many shadowy arcades and dim chapels since the sixteenth century. Especially they suited this girl, who belonged to the world they suggested, or at least to a world remote from all that is classed under the term modern. With his knowledge of the widely

differing strains of blood which met in her veins, and of the still more widely differing hereditary influences which might be supposed to have aided in moulding her character, Lloyd found himself regarding her curiously; but, except in the fairness of her skin, he could perceive no trace of alien blood. Otherwise she seemed to him a perfect type of a race he had always admired, a superb impersonation of the finest physical traits of her people.

"She is a true daughter of the Sierra," he said to himself; and then he spoke aloud: "I suppose that you are on your way home, *señorita*?"

"*Si, señor*," she answered courteously but briefly.

"I had once the pleasure of seeing your home. It is very beautiful," Lloyd went on, choosing the only topic which seemed available.

She looked at him surprised.

"You have seen my home, *señor*? It is very far in the Sierra."

"But I know the Sierra well," he answered. "I have been in it a great deal, and I like it extremely."

Her surprise was now mingled with the same incredulity she had shown when Miss Rivers declared her admiration of the quebrada.

"You like the Sierra!" she repeated. "That is not common with Americanos. They think our country rough and ourselves uncivilized,—at least that is what I have heard, for I know very few of them."

Her tone so plainly added, "Thank God!" that Lloyd smiled again.

"All Americans are not alike, señorita," he remarked. "There are some who measure everything by what they know at home, and who are rude in their criticism of things to which they are not accustomed; but these are uncultivated and what we call provincial. There are others who not only admire all that is picturesque, but who would not if they could change foreign manners and customs, because they give variety and color to the world."

"The señorita is like that," said Victoria, glancing at Miss Rivers. "I did not suppose there were any Americans of that kind until I met her. She admires even the quebrada."

"So you see I tell you the truth. There are Americans and Americans. Unfortunately, not many like Miss Rivers have ever found their way into this part of Mexico."

"But you are like her if you admire the Sierra."

"In that respect, yes. And there are many others who would be wild with admiration over its beauty."

"I should be sorry for Americans of that kind to come," said Victoria, deliberately. "We do not want them."

"Is not that very inhospitable?" Lloyd remonstrated.

The girl looked at him, frowning unconsciously until her black brows made a straight line across her face.

“There is no merit in hospitality toward those who come to ruin and rob,” she said. “And if they did not rob,” she added, with a keen instinct, “they would change all things. It would be no longer our country after many Americans came into it. If I could I would make them all stay away.”

“You would banish us all—even Miss Rivers, who admires the country so much?”

Victoria hesitated an instant. Plainly Isabel Rivers’ charm had been potent even here. But potent as it was it did not make her waver.

“Yes,” she said, “I would wish that even Miss Rivers did not come, because she may bring others; and, whether they admire our country or not, we don’t want them.”

“If admiration of the country is not a passport, then there is clearly no place for me,” said Lloyd, who was at the same time amused and sympathetic. It is possible that these sentiments might have yielded to a sense of natural offence at such plain speaking but for his remembrance of the story which justified both the feeling and the manner in which it was expressed. A mingling of curiosity and interest made him probe a little farther. “I suppose that with these sentiments you would close the gates of your hacienda in the face of all Americans?”

“Americans do not come to our hacienda, señor,” Victoria answered. “But if they should—our gates are never closed to strangers. It is not the way of the Sierra.”

"I know well that it is not. I have never yet asked hospitality in the Sierra and had it refused."

"No, it is never refused," she replied; "but sometimes it is very ill requited."

There was a moment's pause; for Lloyd, who might have answered easily had he been ignorant of what special deed of ill requital was in her mind, felt all power of answer taken from him by his knowledge. And as he looked at her, in her noble beauty, her air of command, her pride and her just resentment, he said to himself that the work which lay before Armistead was not only unenviable but doomed to failure, if this girl had the power, as she surely would have the will, to hold her own against the hand which came once more to return hospitality and trust by robbery.

This was the report which he made a little later to Armistead.

"If I were in your place," he added, "I would go back to Trafford and tell him to come and do his own contemptible work if he wanted it done. But I should also warn him that he will never accomplish it; for this girl will fight like a lioness, and she will have the country behind her."

Armistead smiled—a superior and not altogether pleasant smile.

"It's not remarkable," he observed, "that you haven't—er—succeeded very well in life."

"If you mean that I am a complete failure," Lloyd answered, "I agree with you that it's not re-

markable; but I don't believe that it is absolutely necessary to choose between failure and doing such work as this."

"It is certainly necessary to choose between failure and carrying out the instructions of your employers. If I were foolish enough to go back to Trafford as you advise, do you know what would be the result?"

"I shouldn't care."

"Probably not; but the result would simply be that Trafford would send some other man to carry out his instructions with regard to this matter, and that I should lose a very valuable connection without doing any good to anybody—

"Except to yourself. A man does good to himself when he keeps his hands out of such work."

"You'll allow me to be the best judge of that," returned Armistead, coldly. There was a moment's pause, and then he added: "We are going on with these people to-morrow."

"You mean—?"

"The Santa Cruz party. I find that the *administrador*—what's his name?"

"Don Mariano Vallejo."

"Yes, Don Mariano is a very sensible man. My Spanish isn't academic, but he manages to understand it, and I can extract a good deal of information from him. When we reach Canelas I shall tell him that I have business with Doña Beatriz, and he will then probably ask me to go on with them

to Santa Cruz. If not, we will quietly follow in a few days. I suppose your chivalry has not been so deeply stirred by Doña Victoria that you will desert me at this stage of affairs?"

"My chivalry, as you call it, has been no more deeply stirred by Doña Victoria than it was stirred when you told me the story in San Francisco," Lloyd replied, a little coldly in turn. "Of course I will fulfill the agreement made then, which was that I should accompany you to Santa Cruz and act as your interpreter if you needed one; but further than that I will not go."

"My dear fellow, I haven't the faintest intention of asking you to go further," said Armistead carelessly, throwing away the end of the cigar he had been smoking. "And now let us try to get a little sleep, since we must be up at daylight."

At the time mentioned—that beautiful hour of dawn which is called in Spanish the *madrugada*—all was movement, bustle, noise, about Guasimillas. Packs were being loaded on mules, blindfolded that they might stand still for the cords to be many times cast and then tightened about their *aparejos*; *mozos* were shouting, bridles and spurs were jingling; rolls of bright-colored blankets lay on the ground ready to be adjusted behind the saddles of the riders. In the *huerta* the Rivers' tent had been struck, and mattresses, cushions, blankets rolled in waterproof, to be placed with the canvas and poles on one of the mules standing by in the deep shade of the orange-trees.

Isabel Rivers taking her way to the house, where breakfast was to be served on the corridor, was looking with such delighted eyes at the animated scene, that Lloyd, who met her, paused, struck by her expression.

“*Buenos días, señorita!*” he said, smiling. “You seem to be enjoying something very much.”

“I am enjoying everything,” she replied. “Do you wonder? I have left the nineteenth century—the ugly, prosaic nineteenth century—behind, and am in the fifteenth or sixteenth, when life was full of color, romance, picturesqueness. This is a perfect page out of those times.”

“So it is,” he assented. “And you like it?”

“*Like* is too faint a word. I have never enjoyed anything so much! for I have never before been in a country with natural features so marvellously beautiful, and a life and customs that seem a perfect mingling of mediæval Europe and the East. Don’t you like it, or are you one of the Americans who pine for locomotives and trolleys?”

“I am not,” he assured her with commendable gravity. “I believe I appreciate all the charm you are feeling; although, of course, it is not so fresh to me as to you. But I have lived in the Sierra a long time and it has laid its spell upon me.”

“The Sierra!” she repeated. “Somehow, when you and Doña Victoria utter that name it has a kind of magical suggestiveness. You speak of it as if it were a land apart.”

"It is a land apart—one of the few untouched regions of primeval wildness and grandeur yet remaining on earth."

"And you want to bring a railroad into it and destroy it!"

"I want to bring a railroad into it! Who has been traducing me to you?"

"Somebody—papa or Mr. Thornton—said yesterday that is what you are here for—you and Mr. Armistead."

"Mr. Armistead may be contemplating such an enormity, but I am quite guiltless of it. The useful mule suffices me." Then, as they walked toward the house, he added: "I am glad you admire the country so much; but do you not think that you may grow a little tired of Tópia—after the novelty has worn off?"

"No, I don't think so," she answered. "That is papa's fear; but, then, he does not know me very well. You see," she went on confidentially, "we have not lived together for years—not since my mother died when I was quite a child. Since then I have lived with my aunt in San Francisco, or been abroad with another aunt. So papa regards me as simply one of the genus 'young lady,' and credits me with what he supposes to be the tastes of that genus. I had to *insist* upon coming with him to Mexico."

"The insensibility of fathers to their privileges is sometimes astonishing."

"Is it not? But I hope to make him acquainted

with me before I leave Tópia. You know he can not get rid of me for at least six months. When the rainy season comes, it seems that this river rises and the way down the quebrada is closed."

"I suppose you are the only person who anticipates that event with pleasure. But you know you can always, if you like, go out over the Sierra."

"So Doña Victoria told me. By the by"—she paused again,—"do you know Doña Victoria very well?"

"On the contrary, I met her for the first time last night."

"Oh! But perhaps you can tell me if I am not right in thinking that she is very—typical?"

"Of her people, do you mean? Yes: she has all the finest physical traits of her race."

"And more than the physical traits. It is difficult to express, but it seems to me that I have never before known any one so perfectly in harmony with her environment—all this, you know." And Miss Rivers waved her riding whip comprehensively in a gesture which included all the magnificence of the great gorge, as well as the varied and picturesque human life around them.

"She makes the same impression upon me," Lloyd said, "as if she were an impersonation of the wild, sylvan charm of the Sierra."

"I thought you would feel it, too," said Miss Rivers. "I can always tell whether or not it is worth while to mention a thing of this kind to any

one. There are people who would laugh at such fancifulness, you know."

Lloyd answered quite truthfully that he knew very well.

"But she keeps Wordsworth constantly in my mind—I mean, of course, some of his poetry," Isabel went on. "I find myself murmuring as I look at her:

And her's shall be the breathing balm,
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute, insensate things."

"There is fire under the silence and the calm," said Lloyd. "I saw a flash of it last night."

"Did you? But, after all, the fire should be there to typify perfectly the people and the country, should it not?"

He laughed.

"If you are determined to make a type of her, I suppose it should," he replied. "At all events, it generally *is* there in both."

"She interests me very much," said Miss Rivers. "I shall ask her to come to see me in Tópia, and I hope she may come. Do you think she will?"

"Unless she is as insensible as Mr. Rivers to a great privilege, she certainly will. And if she invites you to her home in the Sierra, let me advise you to go. That would interest you immensely."

"Oh, nothing would prevent my going,—nothing! If she only asks me—yes, papa, here I am! Is breakfast ready? Come, Mr. Lloyd!"

CHAPTER VI.

LAS JOYAS.

AS the quebradas are but Nature's gates of entrance to the Sierra, and their enclosing heights but stepping-stones to the greater heights, sisters of the sky and the clouds beyond, so when the traveller, climbing upward by one of these wild gorges, has tracked its rushing river to its source high in the everlasting hills, he finds himself in the vast Alpine world of mountains and valleys, of hanging woods and singing waters, of abounding freshness, greenness and delight, which forms the crest of the mighty Mother-Range. In these solitudes the homes of men are few; but now and then the hills open and on some uplifted plain are Arcadian breadths of productive fields, and cattle in Biblical numbers,—a picture like a pastoral idyl, set in the frame of the surrounding mountains.

It was such a picture that Lloyd and Armistead saw before them as they drew up their horses on a hillside, which they were descending along a winding trail; and, at a point where the wooded steeps fell sharply away, looked out between the tall stems of giant trees, and through their great crowns of verdure, at a wide, cultivated valley, on either side of

which bold, green hills rolled up; while a crystal stream, shining just now with sunset reflections, flowed through the lovely levels. In the distance a cluster of buildings stood embowered in shade, and the whole scene breathed an air of exquisite tranquillity.

“This,” said Lloyd, “is Las Joyas.”

“Las Joyas!” Armistead repeated. “I thought it was Santa Cruz.”

“The Santa Cruz Mine is two or three leagues distant, among the hills,” Lloyd answered. “This is the Calderon hacienda, which is older than the mine and bears a different name.”

“It’s a very prosperous-looking place,” said Armistead, taking in with sweeping glance the far-stretching fields and the stone walls, miles in length, which enclosed them. “I suppose that it was here Trafford found the—er—lady of whom we are now in search.”

“No doubt,” Lloyd responded dryly, “since it was her father’s property. He was what we would call a self-made man, coming from some small ranch among these mountains; but he must have had uncommon abilities, for he died owning a principality in land.”

“If it’s all in the Sierra, it can’t be very valuable.”

“It will be valuable if this country is ever opened up, for the timber on it alone is worth a fortune; and meanwhile there are ranches enough, besides this hacienda, to produce a fine income—from the point of view of the Sierra.”

“‘Man wants but little here below,’ I should judge, whether he wants that little long or not,” said Armistead as they rode on. “But, now that we have reached here, the question is how shall we be received?”

“Better than we deserve, I haven’t the least doubt,” Lloyd replied. “I spoke to Don Mariano frankly when we parted at Canelas, and told him that you had business to transact with Doña Beatriz on behalf of her—husband.”

“Her husband! Trafford has been divorced from her for at least fifteen years.”

“Such trifles are not recognized here. In the eyes of these people, and as they believe in the eyes of God, Trafford is simply an unfaithful husband.”

“At least Doña Beatriz has recognized the divorce sufficiently to resume her maiden name.”

“Don’t you know Mexican (which is Spanish) custom better than that? Doña Beatriz has not resumed the name of Calderon, because she never gave it up. A Spanish woman when she marries does not part with her family name. She simply adds her husband’s to it with a preposition. She becomes, for example, Calderon de Trafford. And her children are Trafford y Calderon; and if the last name is better known than the first, are likely to be called by it, as in the case of Doña Victoria. It is a custom too common to excite remark, both ancient and legal; not a new affectation, like the doubling of names in the States.”

"Oh, with us there's nobody aspiring to be fashionable who is so poor as to own but one name now!" Armistead laughed. "Well, to return to our subject. What did Don Mariano say when you told him why we were coming to see Doña Beatriz?"

"Replied with the air of a *hidalgo* that Doña Beatriz would receive us if we came to her house, and would hear what we—that is, you—have to say."

"You did not hint anything about the mine?"

"Certainly not. I only opened the way for our reception, without any misunderstanding of the business on which we come. I don't know how you may feel, but I shouldn't care to take advantage of their hospitality on the pretence of being merely travellers in the Sierra."

"I shouldn't call it a pretence: we *are* travellers in the Sierra. And if you hadn't been so frank, we should have been at least sure of a night's lodging. Now they may close the door in our faces."

"There is no fear of it," Lloyd replied. "But since the door is still rather far off, and night falls quickly here, we had better press on a little faster."

They had now descended to the plain; and although their horses were tired from a day's hard work among the mountains, they quickened their pace in response to the spur, as they found themselves on a level road, running by the side of a stone wall which bounded the cultivated fields, spreading so far and fair and green toward the heights which

closed the valley at its farther end. In the west, on a sky of pellucid aquamarine, a few clouds of pure, intense gold were floating; and above them the evening-star gleamed like a diamond. The crystalline clearness of the atmosphere, with its inexpressible coolness and freshness, gave the sense of great elevation; and every breath taken into the lungs was laden with the balsamic odors of the surrounding forests.

After a ride of about a mile they reached the gates of the hacienda, from which a broad road led across the verdant expanse to where the white arches of the dwelling shone, under tall trees. On this road their figures were of course marks for observation from the time they entered the gates; so when they finally drew up before the corridor that ran across the front of the long house they were not surprised to find Don Mariano awaiting them there,—a wonderfully dignified and picturesque figure, with his bronzed eagle face and gray hair.

He greeted them with the courtesy which never fails any stranger at the door of a Mexican house, making them welcome with a hospitality which was not apparently lessened by the knowledge that they came on the errand of one who could only be regarded as an enemy. Then, while their horses were led away, he bowed them through a great doorway—the massive, nail-studded doors of which might have served for a fortress,—into an inner court, surrounded by a corridor, or gallery, on which the

apartments of the house opened. From this it was evident that there had lately been an exodus. A group of chairs near a table were not only empty, but one lay overturned as if from the hasty flight of some one who had occupied it; and there were traces of feminine presence in a work-basket filled with materials for sewing, which had been left on the brick-paved floor of the corridor.

"Be seated, señores," observed Don Mariano, replacing the chair on its legs. "If you have been riding all day in the Sierra, you are no doubt much fatigued and in need of refreshment."

Lloyd, on whom the burden of conversation fell, responded that they were certainly fatigued, but hoped that their arrival at Las Joyas was not an inconvenience. While Don Mariano was assuring him to the contrary a servant approached with a bottle and several small glasses on a tray, and he broke off to beg that they would take some tequila. Knowing this to be a rite of hospitality, the newcomers drained each a glass of the fiery transparent liquid; and Don Mariano having himself tossed off one, the tray was placed on the table. He then offered cigarettes; and these being accepted, opened conversation.

"You are from Canelas to-day?" he asked, as he replaced in its box the unburnt end of the match with which he had lighted his cigarette.

Lloyd replied that they had left Canelas the day after parting with him, and in the interval had been visiting one or two mines.

"We wished to be sure that you had reached home before we presented ourselves at Las Joyas," he added.

"You have business, then, with me, señor?"

"Not directly, señor. You may remember that I told you in Canelas that the business of Mr. Armistead is with the Señora Doña Beatriz Calderon. But he wished that she should be informed of his coming before his arrival; and also that you, her *administrador* and adviser, should be with her."

"Your friend is very considerate"—Don Mariano bowed toward Armistead, who acknowledged the salutation with the air of one modestly receiving his due. "Is his business, then, so important?"

"I think I mentioned to you señor, that he is the bearer of a communication from Mr. Trafford."

"Ah!" Don Mariano looked at the cigarette held between his brown fingers for a moment. "And this communication is for Doña Beatriz?"

"For Doña Beatriz—yes, señor."

Don Mariano rose. It was as if a chill breeze had blown over his whole air and manner.

"I will inform Doña Beatriz," he said, ceremoniously, and walked away.

"We are in for it now, I suppose!" said Armistead, wearily stretching out his legs. "You might have told him that we are dead tired and would like a little rest before discussing business. Where the deuce shall we betake ourselves if Doña Beatriz answers my communication by turning us out of doors?"

“There’s nothing more unlikely.”

“You can never tell what will happen when you are dealing with—er—uncivilized people. We must manage to defer the discussion of the matter until to-morrow. I am aching in every muscle, after ten hours in one of these confounded saddles, riding up and down mountains; and I don’t want to talk business,—I want rest and food!”

“Here comes Don Mariano,” said Lloyd, glancing toward the door leading into one of the apartments where Don Mariano had disappeared; “and Doña Victoria!”

It was indeed Victoria who came along the corridor toward them with the *administrador*. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity, and wore over her head and about her shoulders the *rebozo* which Mexican women seldom discard even in the house; but her striking beauty, with its noble characteristics and absolute naturalness of manner and bearing, lost none of its impressiveness by the lack of setting and adornment. As she approached the two men, who rose to their feet, she held out a slender, sunburnt hand, and gave the tips of her fingers for an instant to each.

“*Sientese ustedes!*” she said, with a queenly gesture; and as they seated themselves again, she also sat down and regarded them with her dark, proud eyes. “We learn from Don Mariano, señores, that you wish to see my mother.”

“Yes, señorita,” Lloyd replied. “Mr. Armistead

is charged with a matter of business to present to the consideration of the Señora your mother."

"She requests that he will present it to me, señor."

Lloyd glanced at Armistead, who, comprehending the words, shook his head.

"I never do business except with principals, if it can possibly be avoided," he replied. "Say to Doña Victoria that it is necessary I should deliver my communication to her mother, but that I will very willingly wait until it is quite convenient for Doña Beatriz to see me."

Victoria frowned slightly when this was repeated to her.

"It is not a question of convenience," she said, with a note of anger in her voice. "It is that I wish to spare my mother something which can not but be painful to her."

"I understand," Lloyd answered; and if there was anger in her voice, there was unmistakable sympathy in his. "But although Mr. Armistead must state his business to you if you insist upon his doing so, it will be better that he should speak with your mother directly. Then there can be no doubt of her answer."

"When I speak for my mother, it is as if she spoke for herself, señor."

"I have not the least doubt of that, señorita; but unless your mother absolutely refuses to see Mr. Armistead, he has no right to deliver his commu-

nication to any one else. You see he is only the messenger of—another person."

"Say that I would much prefer to wait until to-morrow," Armistead broke in. "And *do* give a hint that we should like a room and some supper."

"*Dice el señor que el quiere mucho un cuarto y cena,*" said an unexpected, disdainful voice, which made everyone start and turn around. In a doorway just behind them a tall, extremely good-looking young man was standing, curling the ends of his dark mustache, as he eyed the two strangers with a glance of distinct disfavor.

"My son, Don Arturo Vallejo," said Don Mariano, with a wave of the hand. "He understands English."

"I no spik it well," said Don Arturo; "but I comprehend when others spik it."

"So it appears," remarked Lloyd, dryly. "We are much obliged by your kindness in making us aware of the fact." Then, turning to Victoria: "I hope you will pardon my friend for expressing the desire Don Arturo has so abruptly translated. We have no right to trespass on your hospitality."

"Our house is yours, señor," she said in the familiar formula of welcome of the country. "And, as I told you once before, in the Sierra hospitality is never refused."

"I remember, señorita," Lloyd replied; and it did not need the look in her eyes to assure him that the words she had added in Guasimillas were as present in her memory as in his.

CHAPTER VII.

AN APPEAL.

THE room into which the two Americans were presently conducted proved to be a large apartment, bare of all furniture except two small, hard beds, one or two chairs, and the most primitive possible lavatory arrangements. But their portmanteaus were on the floor, and Lloyd assured Armitstead that such quarters were for the Sierra luxury itself.

“In fact, this house astonishes me,” he said. “I did not think there was anything like it in the Sierra, though I heard in Canelas that Doña Victoria had built a *casa grande* on the hacienda.”

“Doña Victoria seems to be running things altogether according to her own sweet will,” Armitstead remarked, as, having wiped his face on the square of rough toweling provided for the purpose, he made ineffectual efforts to discern his image in a small, green mirror by the light of a single tallow candle. “But although the house is literally a *casa grande*, it seems to have only the rudest furnishing.”

“Naturally, when everything must be made on the spot, or transported a hundred or two miles on

the back of a mule. Besides, those who have never known luxuries don't miss them."

"Luxuries, no—but comfort!"

"Comfort is a relative term, also. This, you may be sure, is a palace in all respects compared to the house in which these people have hitherto lived. But Doña Victoria has been to Culiacan, perhaps even to Durango; she has observed ways of living in those places; and, being a progressive young woman, she has seen no reason for continuing to live in a log house in the Sierra, since sun-baked bricks can be made anywhere."

"I wonder if this progressive young woman is afraid of what her mother may say or do, that she doesn't want her to be seen?"

"I think she simply wants to shield her from pain."

"Pain!" Armistead scoffed. "You can't really believe that she is still suffering from Trafford's desertion! The feelings of people closely allied to savages are very elemental and transitory, you know."

"I know that you had better get rid of your idea that these people are in any sense savages, or else keep it more carefully to yourself," Lloyd returned. "You've had a lesson of the imprudence of taking for granted that nobody around you understands English. That young fellow who translated your remark about a room and supper—"

"Confound his impudence!"

"As much as you like, but he was at least good enough to put you on your guard. It will be well to remember that he has keen ears, a good comprehension of English, and evidently no love for gringos—especially those who come on such an errand as ours."

"I can imagine nothing of less importance than the opinion of a whippersnapper like that."

"Even whippersnappers have their uses. What Don Arturo is young enough to express, you may be sure that everyone else is feeling."

"I don't care a hang what they are feeling! I am here on Business"—the manner in which Armistead pronounced the name of the great American fetich is very inadequately represented by capitalizing its initial letter,—"and I propose to accomplish what I have come for, if the whole Calderon clan rises up to protest."

"They'll hardly be satisfied with protesting."

"They can do what they like. I suppose the writ of the law runs even in the Sierra?"

"Possibly, but I shouldn't care to be the man who tried to enforce it—at least not in the present case."

"Well, I shall not hesitate a moment to enforce it, if I find such enforcement necessary—isn't that a knock at the door? Supper? Good! I'm more than ready for it."

When they emerged from their apartment they saw that a table, in a corner of the corridor where a lamp was hanging, had been laid for two. Don

Mariano, who was seated on a bench near by, rose to invite them ceremoniously to their places, but did not join them.

"It seems they won't break bread and salt with us," Armistead observed, as he sat down. "Quite Arabian, isn't it?"

"It strikes me that they are treating us with a very fine hospitality; all the more because they make no pretense of receiving us as friends," Lloyd replied.

Supper, served by a silent, *rebozo*-shrouded woman, being over, they joined Don Mariano where he sat, wrapped in a *zarape*, at the end of his bench; and smoked, as they shivered in the keen mountain air, while talking of mines and forests. Presently Armistead yawned.

"I think I shall go to bed," he said. "I'm not only tired, but it is plainly the only hope of getting warm. Ask Don Mariano if it never grows warmer here?"

Don Mariano answered the question with an emphatic monosyllable.

"*Nunca!*" he said.

"Well, I suppose it's not surprising," Armistead went on. "What elevation did the aneroid record to-day? Twelve thousand feet? Not strange that one shivers at that height at night—without fire, too! I'd like to build a rousing blaze in the middle of this patio. Since that can't be done, I'm off! *Buenas noches, señor!*"

Observing that Don Mariano was also yawning,

and knowing the early hours kept on haciendas—where the day for all begins at or before the breaking of light,—Lloyd likewise said good-night, but he did not follow Armistead to his refuge of bed and blankets. On the contrary, having seen both that gentleman and Don Mariano disappear, he filled his briar with a fresh charge of short cut, and, plunging his hands in his pockets, walked out of the great front door of the house, on the threshold of which a *mozo*, wrapped to his eyes in his blanket, crouched half asleep.

Wonderful was the beauty of the night which met him as he stepped outside,—wonderful and full of an unspeakable charm of tranquillity. The moon, late in rising, had not yet appeared over the eastern heights; but the starlight of these high regions has a radiance so bright that every feature of the landscape, every fold of the distant hills, could be clearly discerned. Steeped in repose, the lovely valley stretched to the feet of the mountains which surrounded it, their crests outlined against the star-sown sky, their serene and mighty steadfastness embleming beyond all else on earth

that eternal rest
We can not compass in our speech.

And it was not only the picture spread before the eye which conveyed this impression. Lloyd thought of the deep, majestic woods, the towering heights and dark gorges spreading for hundreds of leagues around this spot, and through and over

which whoever sought it must pass. The air was filled with resinous, aromatic odors from the breathing earth, the vast encircling forests; and the only sound which broke the stillness was the music of flowing water, the song which the stream was singing to the night and the stars as it flowed along the base of the hills.

“Señor!”

Lloyd started and turned sharply. Unheard, Victoria had come to his side, and stood looking at him with her eyes full of an expression which for the first time struck him as wistful and appealing.

“Señorita!” he responded quickly, taking his pipe from his lips.

“I saw you go out,” she said simply; “and as I watched you standing here alone it seemed as if you were waiting for some one, and so it occurred to me to come and ask if you will help me a little.”

“Nothing could give me more pleasure than to help you in any way,” he answered. And indeed the sympathy which he had felt for her from the first was now quickened to a chivalric desire to assist her in the fight which was before her unless she yielded to the demand about to be made; and no one could look at Victoria and imagine that she would tamely yield anything.

“I thought it possible that you would,” she said; “because I remembered that when I talked to you at Guasimillas and again at Canelas, you seemed different from others who come into our country. You

seemed to feel, to understand things almost as we feel and understand them."

"I have tried to do so," he assented.

"And therefore," she went on, "you may be willing to tell me what it is that the señor, your friend, wishes to say to my mother."

The liquid, brilliant eyes uplifted to him in the starlight were now almost beseeching; but Lloyd found himself somewhat taken aback by the form in which his assistance was asked.

"Señorita," he said again—then hesitated—"do you not think it would be better to let my friend speak for himself?"

"Your friend has refused to answer my question once," she said, "and I shall not ask him again. But I thought that you might understand that what I wish to do is to shield my mother—to know whether or not it is necessary for her to see this man."

"She does not wish to see him?" Lloyd was conscious of the folly of the question as he asked it.

"Señor!" There was a flash in the liquid softness of the eyes. "Could she wish to see him? But she will do whatever I say, and I know not what to say; but I thought you might help me to decide—"

"And so I will!" said Lloyd, with sudden determination. "There is no reason why you should not be told what concerns you so much. You know that Mr. Armistead has come here as the agent of—"

"Mr. Trafford," she said, as he paused. "Yes, I know that. But for what object does he come?"

“To assert Mr. Trafford’s claim of ownership over the Santa Cruz Mine,” Lloyd answered concisely.

“Ah!” She caught her breath sharply, and again the starlight showed a flash of fire in the dark eyes. “He will dare? But the Santa Cruz Mine is my mother’s; she inherited it from her father; and it had been abandoned for years, when we reopened it, worked it, made it what it is to-day. What claim has Mr. Trafford upon it?”

“It appears that your grandfather gave him a title to the mine when he married your mother.”

“And although he has put my mother away he holds fast to her property. Oh, I know that! But let him be satisfied with the Rosario hacienda, with the Santa Catalina and San Fernando Mines. The Santa Cruz he shall never touch.”

“I hope that you can hold it against him,” said Lloyd; “but I am afraid you must prepare for a fight.”

She lifted her head with the air of one who accepts a challenge.

“We will fight,” she said; and the brief words expressed much.

“Well, that is all,” Lloyd added after a moment. “So now you can prepare your mother, and you can decide whether or not she should see Mr. Armistead to-morrow.”

Victoria brought her brows together in the straight, resolute line with which he was already so

familiar. For the first time she looked away from him, out over the starlit valley to the solemn encircling heights; and there was a pause in which he heard again the song of the stream. It lasted only a moment. Then the girl turned her gaze back to meet his.

"I have decided," she said. "It will be best that she should see him."

"I think so," Lloyd answered, struck by the quickness of her decision. "There can then be no doubt that the answer given is her own."

"It is not that only," Victoria said. "It is that she has a right to speak for herself and to tell that man"—she raised her arm and pointed northward—"how she scorns and how she defies him. In all these years she has never told him. She has kept silence; she has submitted to indignity and robbery; she has asked only to be left in peace here in her own home. But now that he has not left her in peace, that he is trying to carry robbery still further, it is right that she should speak for herself, and not through another."

"It is best," Lloyd agreed again,—although he could not but wonder if the mother would be able to express herself half as forcibly as this creature of fire and energy would speak for her. He thought of Trafford as he had seen him in his office in San Francisco, an embodiment of all the qualities which go to make the successful man of business; and wondered afresh over the link which bound such

a man to these people in the far Sierra: to the Indian woman whom he had married and flung aside, and to this girl in whom two such diverse strains had met, to form—what? The errand upon which he had come so reluctantly began to interest him deeply. More and more he found himself becoming a partisan, all his instincts of chivalry stirred in behalf of these women fighting for their rights. If necessary, he felt that he would fight for them, aid them to defend what was theirs by every rule of equity. Something of this must have been written on his face, for Victoria suddenly held out her hand.

“Thank you, señor!” she said gratefully. “You have told me what I wished to know; you have helped me very much. Thank you and good-night!”

If he had wished to profess his readiness to serve her further—to explain, perhaps, why he was there—she gave him no opportunity to do so. As noiselessly as she had approached she went away, flitting like a shadow from his side, vanishing into the deeper shadow of the doorway; leaving him again alone with the great golden stars, the steadfast mountains, and the singing stream.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOÑA BEATRIZ SPEAKS.

If Lloyd had found Armistead awake when he finally retired to the room which they shared, he would probably have told him of his interview with Victoria and the information he had given her. But Armistead was sound asleep under his blankets, and by the next morning Lloyd decided to say nothing of the girl's appeal to him. After all, he had told her only what she had a right to know, and what her reason for desiring to know justified him in telling. So he held his peace with regard to the matter; and when Don Mariano informed them immediately after breakfast that Doña Beatriz would see them, he accompanied Armistead to the interview with the subdued interest of one who knows beforehand pretty much what will occur.

They were conducted to a large room at the front of the house, into which floods of brilliant sunshine were pouring, showing its spaciousness and bareness; for a number of chairs, ranged stiffly around the walls, and one or two tables were all the furniture it contained; while on the brick floor were only spread one skin of a monster *toro* and several of the beautifully-striped mountain-tiger. Everything

breathed the simplicity, austerity and remoteness of a life as far removed from the conditions of the modern world as that which might have been led in a baronial castle during the feudal ages.

As the strangers, marshalled by Don Mariano, entered the room, two feminine figures came from an inner apartment, both closely wrapped in draperies, but one much larger and more stately than the other,—a woman of mature age and splendidly matured beauty, with features cut on classical lines and eyes of midnight darkness, full of a wonderful liquid sweetness. There was much likeness between her and the slender, also stately, daughter who accompanied her; but Doña Beatriz lacked the suggestion of some possibilities with which the lithe, fiery creature beside her was all alive; and whether or not she possessed the gentleness, it was at least certain that she possessed all the repose of her race.

She acknowledged the salutations of the two men with the usual murmured formulas of politeness; and then, inviting them to be seated with a wave of her hand, sat down herself. Victoria, who had not opened her lips, but merely bowed to them silently, sat down beside her; Don Mariano seated himself a little in their rear, having already explained that Doña Beatriz had requested him to be present at the interview.

There was an expectant pause; and Lloyd, glancing at Armistead, had a sense of satisfaction in recognizing that the latter was at last conscious of the awkwardness of the situation.

"I almost wish that I had stayed in Canelas and sent a letter," he muttered. "Confound it, Lloyd! You'll have to explain the matter."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," Lloyd returned. "I am here to translate whatever you wish to say, but I haven't a single word to say for myself."

"You're extremely disobligeing, I must say! Well, tell Doña Beatriz that I have been sent here by—er—Mr. Trafford to see her with regard to—er—a matter of business."

"She has heard that before, but I'll tell it to her again." And, turning to Doña Beatriz, Lloyd repeated the words in Spanish.

Doña Beatriz bowed with a manner full of dignity.

"I am ready to hear whatever the señor has come to say to me," she answered.

"Then tell her," said Armistead, making a strong grip upon his most business-like manner, "that I have come to remind her that the Santa Cruz Mine is the property of Mr. Trafford, and to inform her that he intends to assert his rights of ownership over it."

A moment's pause followed the repetition of these words. Don Mariano uttered a quick ejaculation, but Victoria's hand on his arm silenced him; and it was Doña Beatriz who again spoke, quietly:

"The Santa Cruz Mine belongs to me, señor; and I do not recognize that Mr. Trafford has any rights of ownership over it."

"Remind her that the mine was given to him by her father," Armistead replied.

"Other things were also given him by my father, señor," she answered. "Some of these he has kept —to his own profit; some he has thrown away." There was another pause, fraught with significance, and then the full, sweet tones went on. "Whether he intended to keep or to throw away the Santa Cruz Mine does not matter. It is mine and I shall keep it."

"Tell her that she can't hold it!" said Armistead, impatiently. "Trafford has a title to it which the law will sustain."

"We have paid the taxes on the mine," Don Mariano interposed before Doña Beatriz could answer this.

"It does not matter who paid them, señor, as long as they were paid," Lloyd replied for himself. "You must know this."

"We have paid them in the name of Doña Beatriz Calderon, Señor."

"I doubt if that would stand against Mr. Trafford's title, señor; especially since the—ah—tie between Doña Beatriz and himself remains unannulled in Mexico."

Don Mariano's face fell.

"It is true," he said. "We did not think of that. We should have let the title lapse and denounced the mine. But who could have anticipated the audacity—the shamelessness—of such a claim?"

Lloyd shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me that you might have anticipated it," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Armistead asked sharply. "What does he say?"

"He says that the taxes have been paid regularly in the name of Doña Beatriz."

"What difference does that make?"

"Not much, I am afraid; although I am not sufficiently acquainted with Mexican law to speak positively."

"Well, I am sure that Trafford is acquainted with it, and he told me that the mine is his by right of a perfect title. Simply tell them this, and ask what they are going to do."

The reply to this question was brief.

"We shall hold the mine, señor," Doña Beatriz said.

"What pig-headed folly!" Armistead commented impatiently. "They can't possibly understand the situation. Why on earth don't you explain it to them more clearly? If only I could talk—"

"Mr. Armistead thinks that I have not explained the situation to you with sufficient clearness, señora," Lloyd said, addressing Doña Beatriz. "He wishes you to know distinctly that Mr. Trafford believes himself to hold a perfect title to the Santa Cruz Mine, and that if you do not yield the mine to him he will take legal steps to assert his rights of ownership."

"You mean that he will force us to give it up, señor?"

"I mean just that señora."

"I have only one answer, señor—let him try! Whether or not he has a legal title to the mine I do not know; but this I know—that he will never succeed in taking it. And if he is wise he will not try to do so. He has robbed me of much"—she opened her arms with a wide, tragic gesture,—"and he has robbed his daughter of more, but he shall not rob us of all. In scorn and contempt we leave him such part of what was mine as he has always held—held and built his fortune upon. But what is here, in the Sierra, is ours by every title of inheritance and of justice, and he shall have none of it." She rose to her feet—a superb figure in her noble beauty, her righteous indignation. "I swear it!" she said. "Do you hear, señor? I swear it by the holy cross that stands over the mine! Neither he nor any one whom he sends shall ever enter the Santa Cruz."

"I suppose there is nothing for me to say in reply, except that I will communicate with Mr. Trafford," Armistead observed, when these words were repeated to him. "What steps he will direct me to take I don't know, but I do know that he's not likely to yield his claim. I am sorry that they are going to put up a fight, but I suppose it was to be expected. Tell Doña Beatriz that I regret extremely to have had to annoy her with this demand, but that I am only acting as Mr. Trafford's agent in the business."

“Doña Beatriz replies that she is aware of that,” Lloyd reported a moment later; “and adds that she hopes you will remain at Las Joyas as long as it may please you to do so.”

“She is exceedingly kind, but I think you had better say that we will leave immediately. We haven’t any excuse for remaining longer, since I suppose they wouldn’t let us see the mine.”

“I certainly wouldn’t advise you to ask to do so. There is a limit even to Mexican courtesy.”

“Then say all the complimentary things that are in order, and let us bid them good-bye and get off.”

The complimentary things having been duly said in stately Castilian, and responded to by Doña Beatriz with a dignity and grace which would not have misbecome a royal personage, Lloyd found himself looking into Victoria’s eyes, which met his own with a very friendly glance, as she held out her hand in farewell.

“*Adios, señor!*” she said. “I shall not forget the service you did me.”

“If I can serve you again, will you remember that I am at your command?” he asked.

She looked surprised.

“But you are with him!”— and she glanced at Armistead.

“In this matter no longer than we leave your gates. In fact, I have never been with him further than merely to serve as his interpreter; but I shall not bear even that part in any steps which he may take against you.”

"In any steps which he may take against us we can defend ourselves," she said proudly.

"Yet a friend is not to be despised," Lloyd urged, a little to his own surprise; for why, he asked himself, should he wish to impress her with the reality of a friendship which after to-day could mean so little to her?

"A friend is never to be despised, señor," she answered hastily; for those around were looking at them with some surprise. Then, with another murmured "*Adios!*" she turned away with her mother.

And so a little later they took their departure from Las Joyas.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE PATIO OF THE CARIDAD.

THE village of Tópia lies far and high in the Sierra, occupying a position so impregnable and almost inaccessible that it is easy to believe the tradition that it was once a stronghold of robbers, before its rich mines were discovered and the present stern rule of law and order began in Mexico. The cup-shaped valley in which the town nestles is surrounded on three sides by immense, cliff-crested, almost precipitous heights, which tower above and curve around it like the walls of a mighty amphitheatre. On the single side where these walls open, the mountain shelf drops sharply and sheerly to the quebrada a thousand feet below, down which pours its tumultuous river, and up which in the season of the rains come vast masses of clouds from the Pacific Ocean, a hundred miles away, that envelop Tópia in their white folds, as they strike the sides of the great mountains which enclose it. A wilder spot, one with a note of more absolutely savage grandeur, does not exist on the face of the globe. And yet it has a note of beauty, too, which stirs the imagination and sinks into the heart with a charm so irresistible that he who has once felt the spell of its

majestic forms, and feasted his eyes on the aerial loveliness of its tints, can never quite be satisfied in other and tamer scenes.

So Isabel Rivers was thinking, as she sat on a heap of ore in the patio of the Caridad mine and looked at the picture before her. It was a very comprehensive view which her position gave; for the Caridad mine lies in the heights which close the northern end of the valley. And as she sat in front of the rough arch of the horizontal tunnel which leads into the workings of the mine, the whole valley was spread with panoramic distinctness at her feet, its stupendous mountain wall sweeping around in splendid curve on each side. Passing over the town of single-storied houses, where the graceful belfry of the church formed the only salient feature, her gaze dwelt on the one bit of distance in the scene—a vision of farther heights robed in azure, which were to be seen through the gateway where the encircling ramparts opened to form the walls of the quebrada lying so dark and deep below. It was a glimpse of celestial softness and beauty, in striking contrast to the stern grandeur of the tremendous cliffs, the mountains, rent and torn and standing as it were on end, which formed the immediate foreground of the picture. Almost unconsciously she murmured aloud some familiar lines:

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms were then to me
An appetite, a feeling and a love
Which had no need of a remoter charm.

Some one laughed, and she looked around quickly. The Mexicans at work in the patio—men bringing out ore, boys seated in groups on the ground breaking and sorting it—were all before her, and it was certain that none of them had laughed; so, turning, she glanced upward. A steep path came down the mountain above the tunnel, from some upper workings of the mine; and along this a young man in dirt-stained clothes was descending rapidly. A finishing run by the opening brought him to her side. Then he laughed again. It was Thornton.

“I heard you spouting Wordsworth,” he said, “and I couldn’t but laugh to think how much one stands in need of a remoter charm—in *Tópia*.”

“Speak for yourself,” she returned. “I don’t think *Tópia* stands the least in need of a remoter charm. And I wasn’t ‘spouting’; I was simply thinking aloud, not knowing of any irreverent listener near by.”

“I’m not irreverent,” he protested. “My attitude toward both yourself and Wordsworth is reverence itself. But, honestly now, you must admit that, however picturesque it may be, there are a few things lacking here, even though we do sit

—on the hills, like gods together,
Careless of mankind.”

“It seems that spouting Tennyson is allowable, though spouting Wordsworth is not,” she said, with gentle sarcasm. “And it certainly isn’t at all true to say that you are ‘careless of mankind.’ I never

saw any one more visibly pining for an atmosphere of five-o'clock teas and golf and theatres, and—and all such things."

He threw up hands and eyes together.

"I call the gods—not ourselves, but the real gods—to witness that I am incapable of pining for a five-o'clock tea, although I say nothing about golf and theatres, I frankly confess that I have a social as well as an artistic side to my character; whereas you—"

"Well?"—as he paused. "Is it the social or the artistic side that my character lacks?"

"Your character lacks nothing, absolutely nothing, which goes to make perfection. I was only about to remark that your social side is at present in abeyance, while you are all alive on your artistic side—fascinated by the novelty of the scenes and life around you."

"What would I be made of if I were not fascinated by such scenes? I don't envy the person who could look unmoved on that"—she indicated the wide and wonderful picture before them,—“or who would not be interested in the people living under those roofs down there.”

He looked doubtful.

"I grant that one might search the world around and find nothing grander in the way of scenery, if grandeur consists in precipitousness," he said. "But for the people—don't you think that human nature

is pretty much the same under whatever roofs it exists?"

"Oh, human nature!" she answered impatiently. "Of course that is the same; in other words, these people love and hate and hope and fear and suffer just as we do. Those things are elemental. But what differentiates human nature are customs, manners, habits, and the mode of expressing elemental feeling. *That* is what I find interesting under those roofs."

"It's evident that you must find something, else you couldn't give so many hours as you do to these Mexican women, who are to me most uninteresting."

"That is probably because you don't know enough Spanish to talk to them."

"The trouble in our conversations is not want of language, but want of topics. We have, as sentimental people say, 'nothing in common.' In self-defense most men under such circumstances are driven to making love, but that I never do."

"Never?"

"If you are trying to entrap me into a stale quotation, I decline to be entrapped. If you mean to cast doubt on my assertion—why, by Jove!—Lloyd!"

The tall, sunburnt man who had entered the patio with the careless air of one who finds himself in a spot with which he is thoroughly familiar looked quickly around at sound of his name.

"Ah, Thornton!" he said, putting out his hand.

And then, uncovering at the sight of the figure rising from the ore-heap: "Miss Rivers! this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Not an unexpected pleasure to find me in Tópia, I hope," she said, smiling; "else you must have forgotten our journey up the quebrada."

"In Tópia, not at all," he replied; "but in the patio of the Caridad."

"Oh, Miss Rivers is immensely interested in mining!" Thornton informed him. "If she continues on the course she has set out upon, she will soon be qualified to take charge of the Caridad."

"Which simply means," explained the young lady, "that I walk up to the mine every afternoon for the sunset, that I have once or twice been taken into the tunnel, luxuriously seated in an ore-car, and that I have been trying to learn to distinguish the different grades of ore."

"It's perfectly wonderful how much she has learned about ores," Thornton remarked.

"I should be very much ashamed," said Miss Rivers, "if I had not brains enough to acquire the rudiments of a knowledge which these"—she waved her hand toward the group of boys engaged with rapid dexterity in breaking and sorting the ores—"have thoroughly mastered."

"It isn't so much a question of brains as of training," said Lloyd. "But I see that I must congratulate the staff of the Caridad on at least one important accession since I left it."

"Yes, Miss Rivers is most important," Thornton declared. "She is the element of civilization. We don't know now how we ever existed without her."

"Very easily and very agreeably also, if I may judge by the stories told of the era before my reign," said Isabel. "You are all like certain savage tribes of which one has heard—you submit and profess to appreciate the rule of law and order, but in your hearts you remember and regret the days of freedom, lawlessness and disorder."

"The Gerente must answer for himself," Thornton said. "It's possible that he may be pining for a return of the arbitrary rule of 'Doña Guadalupe,' as the *mozos* with bated breath called the cook; but for the rest of us, I don't think we are ungrateful for the blessings of Providence. What those blessings are, Lloyd, you can't figure to yourself till you enter the Company house."

"I can figure a little," said Lloyd. "I observed clean windows and lace curtains as I walked up the road a few minutes ago."

"*Clean* windows!" said Miss Rivers. "You mean that you observed, with astonishment, windows at all. There were not any when I came, only great doors, which of course, if one wanted any light, had to be open in all weather."

"I'm sure you remember how we used to enjoy dining in overcoats buttoned up to our chins, with a fog as thick as Doña Guadalupe's soup pouring in through the open doors," Thornton reminded him.

"We have changed all that. Dinner has become a social function, with flowers, evening clothes—"

"Don't believe such nonsense, Mr. Lloyd," said Isabel. "I hope you will come and see for yourself just how civilized we are. And meanwhile here is papa at last."

Mr. Rivers emerged as she spoke from the tunnel, accompanied by a young Mexican who was foreman of the mine. The Gerente at once observed his former subordinate.

"Hello, Lloyd!" he exclaimed, with the extremely tempered cordiality of the Anglo-Saxon. "Where do you come from?"

"From the Sierra," Lloyd answered comprehensively, as they shook hands.

"From the Sierra, eh? And what have you done with Armistead?"

"He is at this moment down at the *meson* in Tópia. We reached there an hour or two ago; and I left him endeavoring to repair the ravages of several days' hard riding and forest camping, while 'a spirit in my feet' led me up the old path to the Cari-dad."

"Well, you'll find the mine in pretty good shape. In the San Juan shaft—you remember it?—we've struck splendid ore. You must go in and look at the vein to-morrow. Meanwhile we are just going home. You'd better come with us."

Lloyd being of the same opinion, the group left the patio and strolled over a road which ran along

the side of the mountain, with two or three hundred feet of steep descent below it and at least a thousand feet of sheer ascent above, until it turned and took its boulder-strewn way down into the village. The shadow of the western hills had fallen over the valley, but sunlight still touched with gold the great cliffs cresting the eastern heights. The exquisite freshness which always comes with the close of the day in Mexico, and especially so in these wonderful Alpine regions, filled the air; forest fragrances were borne from the deep defiles of the hills; and all over the high, mountain-girt valley a charm of remoteness and repose seemed breathed like a spell.

“And so you are just from the Sierra!” Miss Rivers said presently to Lloyd, when her father and Thornton paused to speak to some miners belonging to the night-shift whom they met going up to the mine. “I am disposed to envy you. I have such a longing to climb that mountain wall”—she looked up at the great, sunshine-touched escarpments—“and see the wonders that lie beyond!”

“They are really wonders of beauty and grandeur,” he assured her; “but the country is so wild and untrodden that only a genuine lover of Nature should venture into it. Any superficial enthusiasm would soon wear off under the discomforts and perils which abound.”

“I hope I am a genuine lover of Nature. I have never found my enthusiasm wear off under discomforts and perils. On the contrary, the farther I have

gone into any wilderness the happier I have been. I don't think I should prove unworthy of the Sierra."

"Then climb the mountain wall; the Sierra will welcome you. It will give you glades to sleep in that you will feel it a sacrilege to enter; and, having entered, a hard necessity to leave. It will shade your way with the noblest forests you have ever seen; it will lead you through cañons where no ray of sunlight has ever pierced; it will show you views so wide that you will wish for the wings of a dove to fly out over them; and it will give you pictures to carry away so beautiful that you can never forget them; and, thinking of them, your heart will burn with longing to return to the wild, green solitudes, so high, so remote, so free from the presence of man."

She looked at him, her eyes shining with a light which had not been in them before.

"I knew you could talk of the Sierra if you would," she said. "How you love it!"

"And so I believe would you. Therefore I bid you come."

"I will. I am now more than ever determined to do so. Have I told you, by the by, that Doña Victoria, before we parted, asked me to visit her?"

"I congratulate you on a triumph. I am sure that you are the first *gringa* whom Doña Victoria has ever asked to cross her threshold. And it is a threshold worth crossing. She has built herself a veritable castle—for the Sierra."

“You have seen it?”

“I was there a few weeks ago.”

“How interesting! Why did you go? But perhaps I should not ask.”

“There is no reason why I should not tell you that I went with Mr. Armistead on business.” He hesitated a moment, then added: “It was not a business of which I approve, and therefore my part in it was simply that of an interpreter.”

Miss Rivers was silent for a moment, and glanced over her shoulder to see how far the others were behind, before she said:

“You can’t imagine how surprised I was when papa told me, after we reached home, who Doña Victoria is—the daughter of Mr. Trafford of San Francisco.”

“It must have surprised you.”

“It did more than surprise—it shocked me deeply. Of course, having been brought up in California, I have grown accustomed to meeting divorced people, and to seeing all the dreadful consequences of divorce—broken families, new households, children whose parents have each made other ‘marriages.’ Oh, it is horrible! And, quite apart from any question of religious morality, everyone of the least refinement of feeling must shrink from it with disgust. But what I was about to say is that, accustomed as I am to divorces, they have always been between people who were both anxious to have the tie broken; but papa says that he has heard that this poor woman—what is her name?”

“Doña Beatriz Calderon.”

“Pretty, isn’t it? Well, that she was sent away to these remote mountains because—poor soul!—she was homesick, and in her absence divorced without her knowledge.”

“It is perfectly true.”

“And the man who did this thing has not only built his fortune on her property but continues to hold it.”

“Again perfectly true. And not content with what he already holds, he is trying to obtain more. It is now, or soon will be, a matter of public knowledge that he is claiming the Santa Cruz Mine.”

“The Santa Cruz! O Mr. Lloyd! Why, I have heard papa say that it is the richest mine in the Sierra.”

“If you know Mr. Trafford, it is hardly necessary for me to point out that *that* is reason enough for his claiming it.”

“But he is so wealthy—millions upon millions, people say that he has!”

“The appetite for millions grows with their possession, you know. Probably Trafford’s wealth is exaggerated. Certainly he has use for it all; and he sees no reason why the woman whom he has thrown out of his life should be enjoying the revenues from even one of her father’s mines.”

“Oh!” Language was inadequate to express Miss Rivers’ sentiments. She clenched her hands into two small white fists. “When I think that I have

been in that man's house, that I have walked over his carpets and sat on his chairs and accepted his hospitality, I hate myself," she declared presently,—"or at least I feel as if I stood in need of some kind of purification. And will he succeed?—will he get the mine?"

"Not if Doña Victoria can hold it, you may be sure."

"Ah, Doña Victoria! Yes, I am sure she will fight for her own and her mother's rights. What is she going to do?"

"Sit tight, as our British friends would say, on the Santa Cruz, I think. There's nothing else for her to do."

"And what is he going to do—Mr. Trafford, I mean?"

"I must refer you to Mr. Armistead for that information. I told him when we left the Calderon hacienda that I would help him no further, either directly or indirectly, in the matter; and so I am not in his confidence."

"You are still with him?"

"In other business. We are taking hold of some mines together."

Miss Rivers walked on meditatively for a moment. Then she said:

"I must know what he is going to do. I want to put Doña Victoria on her guard."

"It is very good of you," said Lloyd with a smile; "but I don't really think that Doña Victoria

needs to be put on her guard. She is a very wide-awake young woman."

"But they say in California that no man—no trained business man—is wide enough awake to be able to 'get ahead of Trafford.' I've heard that over and over again. How, then, can a Mexican girl hope to do so? No. We must find out what he is going to do and let her know."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea certainly. But I don't clearly see how we are going to find out without asking Armistead; and of course in that case one couldn't violate confidence."

"You are a man, Mr. Lloyd," said Miss Rivers, pityingly; "and I suppose it is only natural that a man should not know how to make another man talk without directly asking anything, or being bound to consider anything confidential. I will find out from Mr. Armistead what he has been ordered to do; and I only want to know if I can depend on you to help me, if I need your help. I may not need it at all, but if I do—may I call on you?"

"I am at your command absolutely for any service you may require," Lloyd replied with unhesitating promptness; although he could not but smile to think how he had already pledged his service to Victoria in almost the same words.

CHAPTER X.

ARMISTEAD IS CONFIDENTIAL.

STOP, Lloyd!—you aren't going off surely! Isabel, why don't you make him stay to supper?"

This was Mr. Rivers' cheerful shout from the rear, when he saw Lloyd taking leave of Miss Rivers at the door of the house which contained under one roof the offices of the Caridad Company and the residence of its General Manager.

"It's all right, papa," Isabel assured him. "Mr. Lloyd is going after Mr. Armistead. He'll be back presently."

"Be sure and bring Armistead with you!" Mr. Rivers called after the departing Lloyd. "Tell him we won't take any refusal."

"There's not the least probability of a refusal," Lloyd answered with a laugh, as he strode on at a rapid pace; for the Caridad house occupied a position midway between the village and the mountain which held the mine. From its door the road ran slightly downward for several hundred yards, between stone walls, beyond which lay green fields; and then, crossing by a bridge over a small stream that in the season of the rains grew into a raging torrent, became the paved thoroughfare of the village,

lined on both sides with narrow, raised sidewalks and close-set houses, until the plaza which forms the centre of every Mexican town was reached.

Small but very charming is the plaza of Tópia; for it is a perfect bower of green foliage and hedges of roses, that fill the air with their rich fragrance. Here, as Lloyd had anticipated, he found Armistead, seated on a bench under the shadow of the church, which, with its wide, ever-open door, occupies one side of the square.

“I’ve been wondering what had become of you,” he observed, in an injured tone, as Lloyd walked up. “You must know this place,—isn’t there any better *fonda* to be found than the one where we went through the form of dining when we came in?”

“There is a much better one,” Lloyd replied; “and I’ve been requested to take you to it. It is the Casa de la Caridad, which well deserves its name from the wide extent of its hospitality.”

“Casa de la Caridad! That’s a charitable institution,—what we call an asylum, isn’t it? I don’t care to go to a place of that kind.”

“You’ll care very, very much to go when you understand that the Casa de la Caridad in this case means the Company house of the Caridad Mine. It’s an old joke of the employees to refer to it as an institution of charity.”

Armistead remarked that poor jokes did not in his opinion gain in humor by being in a foreign language; and then, having made his protest against

trivial jesting, professed his readiness to proceed immediately to the Casa de la Caridad.

"*You* seem to have lost no time in presenting yourself there," he went on, a little suspiciously, as they walked up the street together.

"I did not present myself there," Lloyd answered. "But while you were in the hands of the barber I strolled up to the mine—you know I used to be on the staff,—and there I met Mr. and Miss Rivers, who insisted on our coming to take supper with them."

"It is certainly very kind of them, and—ah—charitable too. I begin to appreciate the point of that joke. How is Miss Rivers?"

"She looks extremely well."

"She must be getting pretty tired of this place."

"She didn't express any feeling of the kind."

"Oh, she must be! What on earth is there here for a woman of her stamp? I can't imagine how she has endured it even as long as this, and you may be sure she's dying to get away."

Lloyd did not feel called upon to contradict the opinion. Miss Rivers, he reflected, was able to answer for herself; and, after all, it was neither his business nor Armistead's whether she was or was not dying to get away.

The young lady, however, gave the contrary assurance with convincing positiveness when they found her in her sitting-room a little later.

"Tired of Tópia!—anxious to go away!" she ex-

claimed in reply to Armistead's condolences. "But, on the contrary, I am enchanted with Tópia. Life here is an experience I would not have missed for anything; and I shall certainly not go away until after *las aguas*, as the people call the rainy season."

"It's hard to understand how you can possibly be contented in such a place," Armistead wondered with evident incredulity.

"I have always said I had a dash of the gypsy in me," she laughed. "And yet I like civilization too. I see you are looking at the room, Mr. Lloyd. Don't you think I have civilized it a little?"

"I am trying to recognize it as the old room in which we used to camp," answered Lloyd. "You have simply transformed it."

In fact, he had found it difficult to believe that it was the same place with which he had formerly been familiar. It had then been a large, brick-floored, windowless apartment, almost as devoid of comforts as of luxuries. Now there were not only windows, but these windows were hung with the draperies which even from the outside he had remarked; rugs were spread on the floor; in one corner a broad divan was covered with a gaily-striped Mexican blanket and heaped with cushions. In another corner a bookcase stood; a large table loaded with magazines and papers bore in its midst a tall brass lamp, with a crimson silk shade. Pictures, photographs, a tortoise-shell kitten curled up in a work-

basket,—Lloyd took it all in, and then turned his gaze on the girl who had created it.

For up to this time he had never seen Isabel Rivers except in outdoor costume; and charming as she had been in that, and well as it had seemed to suit her, he saw now that she was one of the women who are supremely at home and supremely charming in a woman's own realm—the drawing-room. Gowned in some soft, silken fabric, in which blue and white were mingled, her slender waist clasped with a silver girdle, the whiteness of her neck and arms gleaming through the lace which covered them, she was, in her daintiness, fineness and grace, in the delicate rustle of her draperies, in the faint fragrance which hung about her, an enchanting vision to the man who had been long exiled from all those influences of civilization of which such a woman is the finest flower.

She met his eyes with the pleasure of a child in her own.

“It is a great change, isn’t it?” she said. “And you can’t imagine how I enjoyed making it, and how I enjoy it now that it is made. Generally one doesn’t think of furniture: one takes carpets and tables and couches for granted. But when one has had to create them, one’s point of view radically changes. I am as proud as a peacock of my little comforts and prettinesses.”

“So you ought to be. You must have worked very hard to create all these.”

"Oh, no,—there were so many willing hands to help me! But I think I am most proud of my book-case. I drew the design for it and the Company's carpenter—an old Frenchman whom you probably remember—made it. Papa doubted if he could, but when I showed him my drawing he was simply delighted. 'That is my trade—cabinet-making,' he said. 'You will see. I will do a nice job for you, and I shall take pleasure in doing it.' He did take pleasure in it, I am sure; and I would go to the carpenter's shop and talk to him as he worked. He was very interesting."

Lloyd laughed as he thought of the odd, irascible old Frenchman.

"I should not have credited him with that quality," he said.

"Perhaps you never talked to him. There are very few people who are not interesting when they really open themselves to one. He told me about his youth in France, and how he intended, as soon as he had made enough money—as soon as he sold a mine he had out in the Sierra,—to go back and visit his childhood's home in Burgundy."

Lloyd shook his head.

"I am afraid he will never visit Burgundy if he waits to sell that mine," he said. "It is a prospect into which, when I was here, he was putting all his savings; though your father told him there was nothing in it and advised him to drop it. The old fellow was obstinate, however, and held on."

"He wanted to go back to Burgundy, you see," Isabel said. "His life was hard and without satisfaction; so he cherished one beautiful dream—to go back to France before he died." She paused a moment, and Lloyd did not understand the look which came into her face, although he was struck by its sweetness and sadness. "It is a good thing, perhaps, that he did not go, after all," she went on. "He would, no doubt, have been disappointed there. Things would not have been so beautiful as they seemed to him by the light of memory. And so it is well that he was called, instead, to go on a far longer journey, to a country more remote."

"Do you mean that he is dead?"

"Yes, he is dead. The bookcase was his last work. I am glad that I gave him the pleasure of doing it, and of talking to me the while of his memories and dreams. He died suddenly, just after he finished it."

There was a short silence. What was there in this girl's voice which seemed to give such exquisite meaning to very simple words? Lloyd did not know; he only knew that as she spoke he had a comprehension of things which would have been veiled from many eyes and minds. What had he, for instance, ever seen in the old carpenter but a good workman and eccentric man? But Isabel Rivers had not only discovered in him the ability to do finer work than any one else had ever suspected his power to execute, but she had discerned the

pathos of his life and of his hopes; had sympathized in his yearning to see once more the vine-clad slopes of his native Burgundy, yet had been wise enough to understand that the call of death spared him, perhaps, a last disappointment; and she now paid his memory the tribute of a feeling so kind, so gentle, that Lloyd felt as if it should make the old Frenchman rest more easy in his foreign grave out in the Campo Santo.

The little story seemed also to make him comprehend herself better than a long acquaintance might possibly have done; for we only know people in any real sense by certain self-revelations—always unconsciously made—which do not very often occur. The occasion for one may not arise during years of intercourse, or it may arise within the first hour of meeting a new acquaintance. He looked at the bookcase and then he looked again at the face before him.

“Do you always understand like this?” he said.
“It is a rare gift.”

“I think,” she replied simply, “there is a great deal in taking interest enough to understand. You see I always take interest—but here comes Mr. Mackenzie with the mail! I am sure you haven’t forgotten what an event the arrival of the mail is in Tópia.”

Mackenzie entered as she spoke, followed by a *mozo* carrying a large sack over his shoulder. Mr. Rivers turned from the examination and discussion

of ore-samples with Armistead, and directed the pouring out of the contents of the sack on the table, where it formed an attractive pile of matter under the lamp.

"The carrier is very late in getting in to-day," he observed. "I am afraid it is your fault, Isabel, for making the mail so heavy. Here are two packages of books for you, besides a dozen or so other things."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Miss Rivers. She came forward with shining eyes and stood by the table, the softened radiance of the lamplight falling over her graceful figure and charming face, and catching a gleam of jewels on the white hands untying strings and tearing open wrappers. Involuntarily all the men, except Mr. Rivers, found themselves watching her, with a sense of pleasure in her beauty and grace. "Could anything be more delightful than to get half a dozen new books all at once, when one is so happily situated as to be in Tópia with any amount of time to devote to them?" she asked, glancing up at Armistead.

"There are not many people who would describe themselves under such circumstances as 'happily situated,'" he answered, smiling.

"But how it teaches one the value of books!" she insisted. "What do people who live within easy range of libraries and booksellers know of the thrill with which one opens a package of volumes that

have been brought on a mule two hundred miles over the Sierra!"

"To hear you, one would think the mule gave them a special value," said her father.

"And so it does," she answered. "To a person without imagination—and I regret to say that you haven't a bit, papa,—the thing is indescribable; but, as a matter of fact, the mule *does* add a value."

"It is a pity he couldn't know it; for I am sure that if he were able to express himself he would wish that you had less taste for literature. Won't you look at some of these papers, Armistead?—and you, Lloyd? The 18th—you've seen nothing later than that in the way of a paper from the States."

So the little group gathered round the table, reading letters, glancing over papers and books, for a pleasant half hour, until Lucio appeared in the curtain-hung doorway, and, with his most impressive air, announced:

"*Ya está la cena, señorita!*"

At Tópia, from its comparatively moderate elevation, the temperature of the nights is much milder than at Las Joyas; so when supper was over, the party found it pleasant to linger in the corridor running along the rear of the house. Its arches framed at all times a wide and beautiful picture of the valley rolling away to the towering eastern heights; but at night, either bathed in floods of silver moonlight, or in the still more exquisite radi-

ance of the stars which shone with such marvellous brightness out of the vast field of the violet sky, it was touched with a mystical loveliness,—a poetic suggestiveness and majestic repose impossible to express in words.

The corridor which commanded this wide outlook over valley and mountains and sky was in itself a delightful place; and in one of its corners Miss Rivers had fitted up a nook, where swung the Moorish lantern which had done duty before the door of her tent on her journey up the quebrada, and where long steamer-chairs invited to lounging. Here the group of men, with cigars and cigarettes lighted, gathered around her; and there was much gay talk and laughter, chiefly about people and events in the distant world which they called home. But suddenly Miss Rivers paused, and, turning her graceful head, looked out over the silent valley, where only a few lights gleamed here and there, toward the great encircling ramparts of the cliff-crowned hills, their mighty outlines cut against the star-set heaven.

“We are frightfully frivolous,” she said with a little sigh, “in the face of anything so grand as this scene.”

“What would you have us do?—quote Wordsworth?” asked Thornton. “I confess I’ve never tried living up to scenery; but if I did, I should select something less elevated than the Sierra.”

"Sea-level would about suit your capacity, I should think," remarked Mackenzie, with gentle sarcasm.

"This is a very good distance from which to admire the Sierra," said Armistead, leaning comfortably back in his chair. "At nearer range one's sentiments toward it are not exactly those of admiration."

"Oh, I can't imagine that!" said Miss Rivers, quickly. "I am sure my sentiments of admiration would increase the nearer I came to it. I shall never be satisfied"—she glanced smilingly at Lloyd—"until I have climbed the Eastern pass yonder and found myself in the Sierra—'*pura Sierra*,' as the people here say."

"You'll find it an awful wilderness," said Mackenzie, warningly. "When I first came to Tópia, it was by that route, and I thought I should never reach here. Such mountains! such cañons! such woods! Why, for days we travelled through forests where the trees shut out the sun!"

"It's a way trees have, Mackenzie," said Thornton. "I don't wonder at your surprise, since you come from a region where they are very scarce and quite incapable of such conduct. But if that is the worst you can charge against the Sierra—"

"The worst!" Mackenzie indignantly exclaimed. "You are either going straight up or straight down all the time—or at least most of the time,—climbing over great rocks, where the mules have to put their feet together and jump like cats; and where, if

they should miss, there's a thousand or two feet of fall waiting for you. You skirt precipices that might make the head of a goat swim; and you sleep out in the woods, with the lively prospect that a mountain tiger may kill one of your animals before morning."

"All of which sounds perfectly delightful," Miss Rivers declared. "But I am afraid you exaggerate. The mail is brought with great regularity over these mountains, and one never hears of the carrier or his mule falling over a precipice or suffering death from a mountain tiger. And all the shop-keepers in Tópia get their goods by the same route."

"Do you suppose that if a mule falls over a precipice—or a man either—they post the fact in Tópia?" Thornton asked. "The arrieros shrug their shoulders, pick up the fragments of the pack and go on."

"And to diversify the way pleasingly," Armistead chimed in, "one comes every few miles upon a cross, or group of crosses, erected by the side of the road to show where travellers have been waylaid and killed."

"The crosses need not frighten you, Miss Rivers," said Lloyd, quietly. "They were put up a long time ago, when there were many robbers among these wild heights. But all that is at an end now. The robbers have either been shot or have adopted safer modes of livelihood, and travelling in the Sierra is at present perfectly safe."

"That's true as a general rule," Thornton assented. "But if I had an enemy I shouldn't particularly care to meet him in the Sierra. I have heard of a few fresh crosses being put up even in my time."

"You've also heard of the speedy punishment of the murderers," observed Lloyd.

"Generally, yes. The *rurales* catch them and the government promptly shoots them. But I don't feel that, personally, that would afford me much gratification after I had been bowled over on some of those trails. Not even the pious custom of putting up a cross where I had been killed would in such case be very satisfactory."

"Why should we talk of these things!" Isabel protested. "Mr. Lloyd says that there are no bandits in the Sierra now, and I am sure we, none of us, have any enemies."

"It's very good of you to be sure," said Thornton; "but, unfortunately that is a thing of which one can never be quite certain. We gringos are not loved, you know; and by our manners, or distressing lack of manners, in dealing with the people, we sometimes make enemies when we are unconscious of it."

Armistead moved uncomfortably.

"I fully agree with Miss Rivers," he said, "that this is an unnecessary discussion. There are many occasions in life in which a man must make enemies; but he can't fail to do his duty on that account, or—think of possible consequences."

"Not even though he knew that a cross in the Sierra would be the result," Thornton agreed lightly. "But here comes the Gerente with a handful of papers! My prophetic soul told me that there would be writing to do to-night for to-morrow's mail."

"You boys must come to the office—we have some reports to make out," observed Mr. Rivers as he drew near. "Lloyd, I should like a few words with you about these mineral districts. The company is agitating the question of a railway again."

Armistead looked after the others as they moved toward the office across the patio; and then, his gaze returning to Miss Rivers, as he looked at the charming picture which she made, seated under the swinging Moorish lamp, he was conscious again of that sense of his exceeding good fortune which he had expressed to Lloyd. For surely it was wonderful luck to find this beautiful, brilliant girl, a product and part of his own world, here in these remote wilds, ready to give him an attention which he knew that he could hardly have hoped for had he met her in the scenes amid which she usually moved. He leaned forward. It was impossible not to express what he felt so strongly.

"I have had many lucky happenings in my life," he said; "but never one, I think, quite so lucky as the pleasure of finding you in Tópia at this time. It quite repays me for the hardships and disagreeables of coming here."

"You are very kind," Isabel answered lightly—

for nothing in the way of masculine ardor, however unexpected, ever surprised or discomposed her,—“but I don’t think that one needs to be repaid for coming to this delightful country.”

“Delightful! It can’t be that you really find it so?”

“I really do. And just now I am extremely interested in the trip you have made to the Calderon hacienda. I was so pleased with Doña Victoria.”

“I suppose you know who she is?”

“Yes: papa told me. I was very much surprised to hear that she is Mr. Trafford’s daughter; although one should not be surprised at any result of divorce in California. Would you mind telling me how the situation came about? It seems very strange—*here*.”

When a beautiful woman, with the most fascinating smile and liquid eyes of softest hazel, says, “Would you mind telling me?” the result in the case of most men is a foregone conclusion. It was so with Armistead in this case. Beguiled by an interest which he mistook for sympathy, and pleased to gratify Miss Rivers, while at the same time gratifying himself by talking of his own affairs—to many people the most interesting possible topic,—he related the whole story of the Trafford marriage, of the manner in which the Mexican wife was divorced, of the claiming of the Santa Cruz Mine, and of the determination of mother and daughter to hold it.

“Then that, of course, will end the matter,” said

Isabel, when he reached this point. "Of course Mr. Trafford can't think of forcing them to give it up."

Armistead shrugged his shoulders.

"Trafford is not a man who gives up anything," he said; "and you see the mine is *his*."

"You mean—legally?"

"Legally, of course. There's no other way of owning property."

"There is such a thing as moral right, you know."

"Perhaps so, but moral rights which are not recognized by the law don't amount to anything."

"Then he will try to obtain the mine?"

"There is not a doubt of his obtaining it. I have been to Durango to consult lawyers and judges, and they all say his title is good. We have only to take possession."

"By force?"

"By force if necessary. I have a letter from Trafford to-day telling me to go ahead and do whatever is to be done."

"It seems incredible! And—what are you going to do?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you that I have hit upon a plan which I hope will avoid trouble and litigation. I shall take a number of men, together with some officers of the law, go quietly out to Santa Cruz and take possession of the mine before they can make any resistance. After that it will be impossible for them to regain possession of it."

"Oh!" Miss Rivers sank back in her chair and

stared at him. "How can you do anything so—treacherous?"

"Treacherous!" Armistead was surprised and wounded. "There's nothing in the least treacherous about such a procedure. It's done every day in Colorado and our other mining States. We have given them notice that the mine is ours, they refuse to surrender it, so we shall simply go and take it; and to do so in the form of a surprise is merely a military stratagem."

"I see!" Miss Rivers' tone indicated that she saw a good deal. "And will Mr. Lloyd assist you in this—military stratagem?"

"No!" Armistead replied with disgust. "Lloyd is a fool. Because his sympathies are with the women in the case, he refuses to assist me in any way, and has inconvenienced me greatly by this attitude. I have come to Tópia now to try and find some one to take his place—some one who knows the country and language better than I do. I am hoping that Mr. Rivers may be able to recommend a man to me."

"I think—I hope that papa's sympathies are with the women, too."

"My dear Miss Rivers!" Armistead was earnestly remonstrant. "You do me great injustice if you think my sympathies are not with them. But I am like a soldier, you know—acting under orders. And sympathies haven't really anything to do with Business. That's what I can't make Lloyd understand."

"I am afraid you will never make me understand it either."

"Oh, one expects a charming woman to be—er—guided by her heart rather than her head! It's very disagreeable to me, I assure you, to have to carry out Mr. Trafford's instructions; but I have no alternative. And it wouldn't help the Calderons if I refused to do so; for some one else would be sent to take possession of the mine."

"I quite understand that, and I am sure you must be sorry to have to do such an odious thing," said Miss Rivers, magnanimously. "If I didn't have some head as well as heart, I might detest you for it."

"That would be terrible. You couldn't be so unjust."

"I think I could be, but I won't; I will try to be reasonable and give you my sympathies, too. When do you think you will have your party in readiness to go and take the mine by surprise?"

"That is impossible to say, because the party must consist of men who can be relied on and I don't clearly see how I am to find these without Lloyd's aid. It is very annoying that he is such a block-head—and obstinate as a mule."

"You can't expect everyone to be as clear-sighted as yourself where matters of—er—business are concerned," observed Miss Rivers, sweetly. "Yonder comes Mr. Lloyd now. Perhaps you don't want to talk of this matter before him?"

“Oh, I shouldn’t mind! He would never think of betraying my plan, I am sure. But probably it is best to regard what I have told you as confidential.”

“I shall not repeat it to any one,” she assured him.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE PLAZA.

It was Sunday morning, and Tópia wore its most festal air; not only because of the brilliant sunshine and crystal atmosphere, which lent something of that aspect even to the towering, rock-faced heights, but because the streets were filled with men who, having been paid off the night before, were now industriously spending their money in the *tiendas*, and consuming mescal in such liberal quantities as would have seemed to promise frightful disorder later. But the disorder of Tópia was never so great that the single policeman of the municipality was not able to deal with it. The right of a man to drink himself into a state of intoxication was fully recognized; and when he became reduced either to insensibility, to a maudlin condition of noisiness, or to a desire to fight all his friends and acquaintances, those friends were prompt to carry him away to a place of seclusion. These scenes, moreover, occurred only in the afternoon and evening. At ten o'clock in the morning the future *borrachos* were still in a state of sobriety, filling the shops, the sidewalks and the plaza with their clean white cotton garments and red blankets.

At this time also the better class were very much in evidence; and those who may fancy that Tópia does not possess a better class should go there and sit in the plaza on a Sunday morning, in order to be convinced to the contrary. A place where for many years money has poured out of the earth in a constant stream, like water out of a fountain, must have its plutocrats; and plutocrats, as we know, are speedily and easily converted into aristocrats. Among the well-dressed and perfectly-mannered men who appear on the streets of this old robber stronghold of the Sierra, there are some who are descended from its original inhabitants; others are strangers, and many are foreigners. There is a picturesque mingling of nationalities to be seen in the plaza of Tópia.

While the church bell is ringing out its call to Mass, the air is fragrant with roses, and graceful, dark-eyed women are coming in all directions, with prayer-books and beads in their hands and folding-stools hanging on their arms. In an American town of the same class one knows what one would probably find in the feminine element,—what lack of taste in dress, what love of crude and violent color, what hopeless vulgarity of appearance and manners. But these women might be princesses, as they glide along, clothed in dark fabrics, wrapped in silken and lace draperies, with dignity in their bearing, and much delicate loveliness in the faces under the fringed parasols. They were just now passing in

numbers toward the open door of the church; for the second call had ended, and at the third Mass would begin. A group of young men—chiefly Caridad employees,—seated on a bench in the sunshine, found it necessary to rise to their feet every few minutes and uncover in response to a smile, a flash of eyes and teeth, and a musical "*Buenos dias, señores!*" It was in an interval of this performance that Thornton turned to Lloyd, who was one of the group.

"I had almost forgotten that I have a message for you," he said. "A party are going out this afternoon to eat *tamales* at the San Benito Mine, and you and Armistead are invited to join us."

"Who are 'us'?" Lloyd inquired carelessly.

"Oh, all the élite of Tópia, I believe! The San Benito belongs to the richest man here, you know—Don Luis Gonzales. There will be music and dancing, and Miss Rivers told me to see that you bring your sketch-book."

"How does Miss Rivers know that I have a sketch-book?"

"I told her that there was an artist spoiled when you became a mining engineer and prospector."

"What was the good of yarning about me so absurdly? Miss Rivers can make more satisfactory pictures with her camera than I can with a pencil."

"She doesn't think so—and here she comes to speak for herself."

Lloyd looked up quickly. It was indeed Isabel

Rivers coming between the rose-hedges, transformed into a high-born Spanish maiden by the black lace mantilla thrown over her sunny hair. She paused, smiling, as the men rose.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Lloyd," she said. "Won't you and Mr. Armistead dine with us to-day, and go to the picnic afterward? I suppose you have been invited."

"Thornton was just saying something about it," Lloyd replied. "But I am rather an unsociable person, and I'm afraid that going out to the San Benito to eat *tamales* doesn't appeal to me very strongly."

"Oh, but it should appeal to you as something immensely picturesque!" she said. "You simply *must* go. I am sure it will be delightful. And be certain to bring your sketch-book: Mr. Thornton tells me you draw admirably—ah, there is the third call for Mass! I shall expect all of you to dinner. *Hasta luego!*"

She passed on toward the open door of the church, into which men and women were hastily pouring from all sides; while Thornton laughed at the expression of Lloyd's face.

"*Viva la reina!*" he said. "It would take a bold man to disobey her commands. Well I'll see you later. Now I must put in an appearance at church. No, I'm not a Catholic; but Miss Rivers is, you know; and I think she probably looks upon me with a more favorable eye if she has seen me leaning in the doorway during Mass. It shows that I have a

mind free from prejudice and perhaps—under certain circumstances—open to influence. Come, Mac!"

Mackenzie—a Catholic by inheritance, being a Scotchman of Highland ancestry—rose, together with two or three Mexicans who also formed part of the occupants of the bench, and moved toward the already overflowing door of the church which opened on the plaza. Lloyd sat still in the sunshine a little longer; and then, as the sound of the organ came out to him, he also rose and walked round to the door which opened on the street, where the crowd was less. Here, leaning like Thornton against the side of the doorway, he looked over a scene familiar to all sojourners in Mexico,—a compact mass of people, filling the church (a nave without aisles) from wall to wall; the women kneeling on the brick floor, the men mostly standing until the solemn part of the Mass. At the farther end of the vista candles were gleaming on an altar, before which a priest was slowly moving to and fro. Lloyd had but a vague idea of what was progressing there, but the scene appealed to some instinct of his nature which he hardly understood—it was, in fact, the instinct of worship, the deep-seated human need to turn to something higher than itself,—while a certain fineness of mental and spiritual fibre, together with a fair amount of culture, enabled him to feel and in a measure enjoy the antiquity and poetry of the mysterious rite.

Nevertheless, since he understood little of the details of the service, his glance wandered idly over the crowded mass of people,—over the rebozo-covered heads of women of the lower orders and the lace-draped heads of ladies; over the forms of men standing with folded arms; some in careful, fashionable dress, others wrapped in blankets;—all grave, quiet, reverential, ready to sink on their knees when the bell should sound in the sanctuary. Among them were many faces which he knew; but suddenly his gaze was arrested by one which, although he was conscious of having seen it before, he could not at once identify. And yet it was striking enough to remember,—the face of a young man who held his handsome head uplifted with an arrogant air which after an instant enabled Lloyd to recognize him. For it was Arturo Vallejo; and just so he had stood, just so held his head when he contemptuously translated Armistead's speech at Las Joyas.

The sight of him recalled vividly to Lloyd's mind the recollection of Las Joyas and of the conflict over the Santa Cruz. He had little doubt that it was something relating to this conflict which had brought young Vallejo to Tópia. Was it perhaps to meet Armistead? It seemed unlikely; but since his refusal to assist in any active steps to assert Trafford's claim on the mine, he knew nothing of how the situation stood nor what Armistead's plans in regard to obtaining possession of the property were. If any chance should enable him to know or to guess these

plans, it would afford him pleasure to give even this somewhat ill-mannered young Mexican a hint of what was to be anticipated; but there seemed no probability of getting such information, unless—and here a sudden flash of enlightenment came to him. Last night, had not Miss Rivers when he bade her good-night murmured some words which he had not understood, but which now returned to him with a clear apprehension of their meaning? "I am in a quandary," she had said, "and I want to talk to you about it."

A quandary! The expression possessed no significance for him then, and he had made some light reply about being at her service always. But now, remembering her conversation with Armistead, he understood; and understood also, in slow, masculine fashion, the command which had been in her eyes when she bade him join the picnic party that afternoon. On such an occasion there would be many opportunities for the talk she wanted, especially if he obeyed her other command and carried his sketch-book along. It was not, he told himself, what he desired: to be brought into confidential relations of any kind with this girl, whose charm he felt might be so potent and sink so deep; but at present there seemed no escape for him. Not only, as Thornton had said, would he be a bold man who disobeyed Isabel Rivers' commands, but the appearance of Arturo Vallejo quickened the memory of the other girl whom he had promised to help.

If this help might be obtained through Miss Rivers, he was bound to go even to the length of exposing himself to possible danger—the danger of finding a hard-won peace of mind and heart taken from him again by the witchery of a woman's face and a woman's smile—in order to obtain it.

The bell in the sanctuary sounded. The men dropped on their knees. Lloyd waited a few minutes until the solemn hush was over, and then turned away from the door, back to the sunlight and roses of the plaza. As he did so he looked up at the vast, solemn heights encircling the valley, and a great longing stirred within him to find himself in the wild, green solitudes which lay beyond them,—the solitude so high-uplifted toward heaven, so remote from the world of men's sordid struggles, where he had never failed to find content, pleasure and health. Yes, the sooner he saddled his mule and was out in the Sierra again the better. To-morrow perhaps—

“Hello!” It was Armistead’s voice, in a tone of much surprise. “Have you been to church? The confounded bells wouldn’t let me sleep, so I had to come out; though how one is to get through the day in this beastly place—”

“There are alleviations promised,” said Lloyd, regarding with some amusement the other’s careful toilet and air of being on exceedingly good terms with himself and the order of things in general. “For one, you are invited to dine at the *Casa de la Caridad*—”

"Oh, very good! You've seen some of the Caridad people, then?"

"Yes. It's the early bird that catches the worm—or is himself caught, you know. I've had the pleasure of receiving the commands of the Lady of the Caridad. We are to report for dinner; and then, with a select party, go out this afternoon to eat *tamales* at a mine near by."

"Why at a mine?"

"The nature of the country answers that question. The patio of a mine affords the only space sufficiently level even for the eating of *tamales*."

Armistead gave a comprehensive glance around at the precipitous heights.

"Are you sure that Miss Rivers is going?" he asked skeptically.

"Perfectly sure. She thinks that it would be picturesque, and says she would not miss it for anything."

"In that case of course I'll go; although it strikes me it will be a tremendous bore. Miss Rivers, however, would make anything endurable. I'm more and more struck with what an extremely lucky thing it is that she should chance to be here."

"Lucky for—?"

"For me, of course—I wouldn't be presumptuous enough to intimate that it may prove lucky for her also. But think of the difference her being here makes—and, by Jove, yonder she is!"

Lloyd looked after him as he pushed his way

through the people, now thronging out of the church, to Isabel Rivers' side.

"Extremely lucky for him that she happens to be here!" Lloyd repeated to himself meditatively. "It's barely possible that he may find reason to change his mind on that point before all is said and done—ah, Don Arturo! how are you? And how are the family at Las Joyas? You see I remember that you speak English."

There was anything but a cordial light in Arturo Vallejo's dark eyes as he replied coldly, in almost the exact words he had employed at Las Joyas:

"I no spik English well, señor."

"Perhaps not, but you understand it well—I remember that. And we can talk in Spanish, if you prefer."

"I do not know that we have anything of which to talk, señor," the young man answered distantly, in his own language.

Lloyd smiled.

"I think we might find a subject," he said. "May I ask if any of the family of Las Joyas are with you in Tópia?"

"No, señor." There was suspicion as well as coldness now in the tone and eyes. "I am here alone."

"I am sorry. I should like to see Doña Victoria."

Vallejo started angrily.

"I am sure that Doña Victoria would not wish to see you," he said rudely.

“Do not be too sure of that,” Lloyd replied quietly. “I think Doña Victoria is aware that I am her friend.”

“You have proved it so well!” the young Mexican cried in a tone of sarcasm.

“I have not had very much opportunity to prove it,” Lloyd said; “but Doña Victoria was good enough to believe that in the matter of the Santa Cruz my sympathy is with her.”

Don Arturo permitted himself a very cheap sneer.

“Doña Victoria is a woman!” he said.

“And has a woman’s instinct to recognize sincerity,” Lloyd returned.

“You talk of sincerity—of sympathy—of friendship for her,” the other cried indignantly, “when I have just seen you with our enemy!”

“He is not my enemy, you know,” Lloyd remarked dispassionately. “And in point of fact, he is not your enemy either. He is only Mr. Trafford’s agent.”

“It is the same thing. He is trying to rob—”

“Suppose we find a quieter place in which to discuss the subject?” Lloyd suggested; for the people about them began to cast curious glances at the angry face and excited manner of the young Mexican.

But Arturo threw back his head in its characteristic pose.

“We have nothing to discuss,” he replied. “I understand what you want. It is that I shall talk, be-

tray myself, tell you our plans perhaps, because you profess to be sympathetic. You must think, señor, that Mexicans are great fools."

"Not all of them," answered Lloyd, tolerantly. "It is a pity your father did not come to Tópia. I should have been glad to talk with him. But now—" he shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Life has a great deal to teach you," he added; "and I hope the first lesson will be that it is very bad policy, not to speak of bad manners, to insult any one, especially one who might have the power to aid you materially. Good-day!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE USE AND FATE OF A SKETCH.

THE sun, which in Tópia disappears very early behind the great rampart of the western heights, was dropping toward these heights, and the latter were already stretching their long shadows out over the sun-bathed valley, when the picnic party left the town. It had been said that they were to leave promptly at three o'clock,—*punta de la hora*; and since they finally started at four, they probably came as near to punctuality as anybody ever arrives in Mexico.

The San Benito Mine was very well situated as an objective point for such an excursion. It lay close to the town, in the heights that on the western side immediately overshadow it. All Miss Rivers' love of the picturesque was gratified by the appearance of the procession, which, leaving the principal thoroughfare, passed down a short, rocky, cañon-like street, crossed on stepping stones over a stream which flows through the gorge, and then, climbing up the steep hill immediately beyond, followed a narrow path which wound around its side. Very Mexican was the order of progression. Arm in arm, gaily talking and laughing with each other, went the girls in advance. Following them more sedately was a group of matrons; and, at a con-

siderable interval, behind came a number of men. Between the feminine and masculine contingent was the Caridad party,—Mr. Rivers beguiling the way by expressing very freely (in English) his opinion of the absurdity of the arrangement.

“Those men should be in front with the girls, not only for mutual pleasure but for practical usefulness,” he declared. “It isn’t as if they were circling round the plaza, or even walking on level ground. There’s positive need—take care, Isabel! Look out for your footing!—of their assistance. Some of these old women will be rolling down the mountain presently—ah, I thought so!” (A stout lady in front stumbled and almost fell.) “Permit me señora, to assist you.”

“*Muchas gracias, señor!*” murmured the lady.
“*Muy malo el camino!*”

“Very bad indeed,” Mr. Rivers assented; and then, seeing his way to making a suggestion, went on in fluent Spanish: “It strikes me, señora, that those young men”—he waved his hand backward—“ought to be here, assisting the ladies over the road. Every lady should be provided with an escort.”

“Is that the custom in your country, señor?”

“Undoubtedly. And it adds very much to the enjoyment of an occasion like this.”

“Ah!” said the señora, in a tone of much significance. “I can believe it. But with us it is different. We have other customs.”

“And long may they keep them!” said Isabel,

laughing at her father's slightly discomfited expression as he fell back. "The world would be a very uninteresting place if there were no variety in its manners and customs. And for my part I like these. Fancy how much more possibility of romance there is between young people here than between those who associate together as freely as they do with us!"

"And how much room for disillusion when romance is converted into knowledge by marriage!" Thornton added.

"The practical result is otherwise," she answered. "Those who know Mexico best tell us that one rarely hears of an unhappy marriage, and a broken household is almost unknown."

"Miss Rivers is right," said Lloyd. "The domestic virtues of these women are beyond praise. They don't clamor for rights or careers; they don't form clubs and make speeches; but they make homes and govern them in an old and very wise fashion."

"All the same, I am sure that Miss Rivers would not like to be bound by their hard and fast social rules," Armistead observed.

"Perhaps not," Miss Rivers acknowledged, "because I am a product of other social conditions. And I like freedom, but not the freedom that leads to forgetfulness of manners first and duties afterward—Oh, what a view of the *quebrada*! Mr. Lloyd, what can we do with this?"

"Not much more than admire it, I'm afraid," Lloyd replied.

It was indeed a striking view of the great chasm which opened before them as they turned the shoulder of the hill around which they were winding. Far below, in its dark depths, they caught the gleam of water; while on either side rolled up vast, broken heights,—their rugged crests, bathed in sunlight, standing against a sky of jewel-like brilliancy and intensity of color. It was a scene of such wild grandeur that to think of reproducing it by camera or by pencil was to realize the littleness of man's art in the presence of Nature at her greatest.

"It is hopeless," Isabel confessed, with a sigh. "To attempt to photograph this would be as useless as it would be impertinent."

"Lloyd can do wonders with sepia," Thornton suggested.

"I can do something," Lloyd admitted. "But I agree with Miss Rivers that to attempt to put this scene on paper would be hopeless."

"I am not sure about that when it is a question of sepia," Isabel said. "You might try,—just a sketch, you know."

"Here we are at the mine," said her father.

As he spoke they stepped from the narrow path they had been following onto a level space—the patio of the mine, a platform about fifty feet square, cut out of the almost precipitous mountain-side. On it the ore from the workings was brought for sorting, and from it the débris was dumped. On the inner side was the great arched opening of the mine

into the mountain, which towered high and steep above; and over the door of this tunnel a shed, as wide as an ordinary corridor, led to the office—a small building at one end. The rest of the patio was open to the sky; and its outer edge dropped sheer to the depth of the quebrada, a thousand feet below. Preparations had been made for the coming of the pleasure party. The ground had been carefully swept, seats were placed under the shed, musicians were assembled; servants were lounging around the door of the office, within which presumably the *tamales* had been deposited; and as the merry throng spread out over the space, filling it with life, movement, gaiety, it was a picture which for striking contrasts would have been hard to match. In a few minutes, the masculine contingent having arrived, the musicians began playing a waltz, and one couple after another responded to its invitation. Soon the whole patio was filled with young people dancing with all the grace and joyous *abandon* of their Spanish blood.

“Isn’t it charming!” Miss Rivers exclaimed, as she stood watching the scene. “What wouldn’t I give to be able to seize and put it away, to refresh myself with on some cold gray day, in a tame country, among a lifeless people!”

“You are immensely flattering to your own people,” Thornton said, with a laugh. “Won’t you let some of us prove that we are not altogether lifeless?” He held out his hand. “Can you resist this music?”

"The music with difficulty, the floor—shall we call it?—with ease," she answered. "Still, I like new sensations; so I'll try how it goes to waltz on the patio of a mine—just once."

The next moment she was floating around with the rest over the hard-packed but somewhat uneven surface of the ground; and to more than one pair of watching eyes she seemed the incarnation not only of grace—grace a little different from that of the Mexican girls, because there was in it a quality which suggested another and very different world—but also of that healthy, happy delight in life which does not disdain the simplest pleasures.

As she might have foreseen, however, she was not able to limit her dancing to "just once." When she paused Armistead claimed a turn, and then half a dozen Mexicans thronged around her. So she danced with one after another, while Thornton came up to Lloyd and grumbled.

"If I'd known I was letting her in for this kind of thing, I'd never have asked her to dance," he said. "Anybody else would just refuse those fellows—tell 'em she's tired, that the ground hurts her feet,—but no! That's Miss Rivers! Does something confoundedly disagreeable for the sake of other people and then declares she enjoys it."

"Perhaps she does enjoy it. Consideration for others is so rare that we must find some selfish reason to account for its existence at all."

"Hum!" Thornton lighted a cigarette. "Look

at that fellow Martinez, how he is beaming all over! Why don't you go and have your turn also? She dances delightfully."

"And let her wear out her feet practising the virtue of unselfishness on my behalf? Why don't you follow her example and go and dance with some of those Mexican girls?"

"Good Heavens! who could think of dancing for the sake of dancing on a place like this? It makes my head swim to look over the edge and think where one would go if one waltzed a little too far. We've heard of shivering and balancing and doing various other uncomfortable things on the edge of a precipice, but I'm sure nobody ever heard of dancing on the edge of one before."

"The idea is certainly quite Tópian—if not Utopian. But, as a matter of social duty, you ought to take the risk and support the credit of the Cari-dad."

"Mackenzie's doing enough for the whole staff. He has already waltzed with every girl here, and now he's making a second round. But here comes Miss Rivers. She has cut short her career of self-sacrifice—unless she's coming to ask you to dance, since you haven't asked her."

But it appeared that Miss Rivers had a very different purpose in view.

"O Mr. Lloyd," she said, "I am so concerned about your sketch! If it isn't made now, there will be no time to make it at all; for we shall soon be

called to drink chocolate and eat *tamales*, and after that it will be too late to do anything except go home. Won't you come and try what you can do in the way of making a picture out of this wonderful scene?"

"I'm at your orders, Miss Rivers," Lloyd answered. "But the quebrada is rather a large commission, you know. Suppose you show me the point of view you care for."

"I don't care for this," she said, indicating the patio. "I want the view of the quebrada. Oh, I know it's a large commission! But you can try. And I think the place to try is a little farther on around the mountain. I'll show you where I mean."

Thornton, who did not feel encouraged to offer his assistance in this search after the picturesque, watched them with rather a cynical eye as they walked across the patio.

"It's a hopeless case with Lloyd, as with the rest of us," he reflected; "else wild horses couldn't have dragged him here. And how obediently he does her bidding,—he who couldn't be brought within speaking distance of a woman a little while ago! Yet I'll swear there's no coquetry in it. If there were, the charm wouldn't be half as powerful as it is."

Lloyd himself had not the least doubt on the last point. No man would have been quicker to detect even a shade of coquetry in the beautiful eyes with their golden lights, in the tones of the sweet, frank voice, or in the manner full of that highest ease

which is as free from familiarity as from constraint. But underneath Isabel Rivers' charm lay an exquisite sincerity, an absolute freedom from the small demands which many women are constantly making for admiration, and a possibility of sympathetic comradeship not to be mistaken. And so there was no more thought of the possibilities for flirtation which the situation contained in Lloyd's mind than in her own, as they walked together on the narrow mountain road, a little beyond the patio where the music was playing and the dancers were circling in the face of a scene so full of wild majesty and stern sublimity that it seemed as if it must inspire awe in the most careless soul.

"What do you think of this?" Isabel asked, as they paused at a point which commanded an admirable view of the great earth-rift, in the depth of which shadows were already gathering, although sunlight still gilded the summits of its eastern heights. "It is tremendous—but magnificent."

"I'll see what I can do with it," Lloyd answered guardedly.

They seated themselves on some stones, and he dashed the outlines of the picture on his paper with bold, firm, rapid strokes, shading in almost as quickly as he drew. It was such skilful work that Isabel watched with fascinated attention as it grew under his hand.

"I have seen engineers before who sketched well from nature," she said at length; "but yours isn't

work of that kind. It is the work of an artist—a real artist. They were right who said so."

"Oh, no!" Lloyd responded quietly. "It's only the work of one who possesses a little more facility than is common. I am inclined to think it is a fatal gift, that of facility," he went on after a moment. "A man who does many things well hardly ever does any one thing superlatively well. It is the narrow, concentrated man who succeeds in life."

"I am not sure of that. The power to do many things well must tell in the one thing upon which a man concentrates himself."

"Such men rarely do concentrate themselves. They diffuse their power over too many things, and there's temptation in all of them. Now, I—but there's no need to point the moral by becoming egotistical. That I am prospecting in the Sierra points it sufficiently, as far as I am concerned."

A short silence, during which the sketch grew in a most satisfactory manner; and then Isabel said:

"I can understand the temptation of being able to do too many things, and the pleasure of doing them all. But I am confident that if such a man once finds a sufficient incentive to concentrate his powers, he will accomplish more than the man to whom nature has given the capability of doing only one thing."

"Experience is against you," Lloyd replied. "And—where is the incentive to be found?"

Isabel lifted her glance from the slender, nervous,

sunburnt hands she had been watching in their work, to the clear-cut face with its impress of thought and feeling and its shadow of hopelessness.

"There are many incentives," she answered; "and different incentives appeal to different natures. But there is one which, like a master-key that opens all locks, should appeal to all."

"And that is—?"

"Duty."

"I'm afraid you are very old-fashioned, Miss Rivers. Duty, like a good many other things we used to be told to admire, has been laid on the shelf, —hasn't it? And doesn't it strike you that we've been led rather far afield by my slight facility in sketching?"

"Perhaps so," said Miss Rivers, and then was silent again for a moment. An instinct told her that this man, with the face of a thinker and the hands of an artist, had drifted somewhat from his moorings; that he had lost faith in many things beside duty; and also that, unlike most people, he was not at all anxious to talk of himself. She had too much tact to pursue the subject on which they had accidentally fallen; and, moreover, it now occurred to her that she had brought him here for quite another purpose, and that it was impossible to count upon being left very long without interruption.

"Do you remember," she said suddenly, under the spur of the last thought, "that when we talked of the claim which Mr. Armistead is pressing for

the possession of the Santa Cruz Mine, I told you that I would find out if possible what steps he was going to take against the present owners? I believe you were doubtful of my success—”

“Was I?” Lloyd asked, smiling. “If so, I apologize for lack of faith. I am now thoroughly convinced that you would succeed in whatever you undertook.”

“That’s very good of you. But, as a matter of fact, I have both succeeded and failed. I have found out all that he intends to do, but I can’t use the knowledge because it was imparted ‘confidentially.’ Isn’t that a hard situation?”

“It’s inconvenient certainly, if you want to help Doña Victoria.”

“I do want to help her,—indeed, I am determined that I *will* help her; yet I don’t see how I can without violating confidence. Can’t you assist me, Mr. Lloyd? That is what I have brought you here to ask.”

“I shall be delighted to assist you in any way,” Lloyd replied, “if you will tell me what you want me to do.”

“I want you to do something so difficult that I am afraid you will never be able to accomplish it,” she answered, half laughing. “I want you to find out what I can’t tell you.”

“Find out from whom?”

“Why, from me, since I am the only person at present, except Mr. Armistead, who knows. Sup-

pose you were a diplomatist or a detective and I was a person holding important information which you were very anxious to obtain, how would you set about making me betray it?"

Lloyd shook his head.

"I can't possibly imagine myself either a diplomatist or a detective," he said; "and I am perfectly sure that even if I were both I could not make you betray any secret you wanted to keep."

"But if I didn't want to keep it—only, of course, that won't do. I must keep it just as resolutely as if I were not anxious to betray it; mustn't I?"

"I—suppose so."

"The fact that I should be serving a good cause by betraying it would be no excuse," she proceeded dejectedly. "I never could have imagined that I should feel sympathy for an 'informer,' but I do. I am simply dying to tell you all I know; and yet how can I when Mr. Armistead asked me to consider it confidential, and when I said I would?"

"Then of course you can't tell it," Lloyd agreed.

"No, of course I can't," she repeated. She clasped her hands around her knees and gazed meditatively into the depths of the quebrada. "You are not much help, Mr. Lloyd," she added after a moment.

"Not the least, I'm afraid," Lloyd agreed again.

"Now, if you were Mr. Armistead," Miss Rivers went on, "you would set your wits to work to find out all that I can't tell: you would cross-question and try to entrap me, and end by guessing the whole thing."

"I think it very likely Armistead would do all that," Lloyd answered. "But you see I am no more Armistead than I am a diplomatist or a detective."

"Is there no way, then, that my knowledge can be made of use?" she asked despairingly.

"Let me see!" said Lloyd, meditatively. He shaded his sketch absently while he reflected, and Miss Rivers watched him with an expression of mingled doubt and hope on her face. "Suppose we look at it in this way," he went on at length, glancing up at her. "As a friend of Doña Victoria, you wish to warn her against a danger which threatens her; and you have—at least in my opinion—a right to do as much as this, although you can not tell her the exact form of the danger. Now, is it a danger against which she is prepared?"

Miss Rivers shook her head emphatically.

"At least we have no reason to suppose so," she added.

"Then it does not take a legal form; for she is undoubtedly prepared for anything in that line."

Isabel felt that the gray eyes reading her face grew suddenly very keen.

"It must take the form of force. Ah, I see!—the mine is to be surprised, of course. You needn't make such a desperate effort not to nod assent, Miss Rivers. I know I am right, even if your eyes didn't tell me so. It is just what Trafford and Armistead would do."

"But I haven't told you really!" she cried, smit-

ten with remorse now that her purpose was accomplished.

"You have done nothing except put my slow wits to work," he assured her.

"They were not very slow when they once got to work," she answered. "And now, supposing your guess to be right, what will you do?"

"That requires some consideration. There is a young fellow here from Las Joyas who might be of service if one could give him a hint. But he is, unfortunately, quite impossible: suspicious, distrustful; also, as a trifling matter of detail, insulting,—in brief, a young fool."

"Couldn't *I* do anything with him?"

"Certainly. You could turn his head so completely that he would not know whether he was walking on it or on his feet. But that wouldn't help matters much, since you couldn't yourself give him any warning, you know."

"Still—" she was beginning, with a laugh, when he startled her by dropping his drawing and springing to his feet.

Far up the mountain-side above them there was a dull, crashing sound. As Lloyd seized the girl, raised and drew her swiftly to one side, the sound became a roar: a great boulder, dislodged from its place several hundred feet higher, came crashing down the steep declivity, bringing shrubs, stones, earth with it; falling upon the spot where they had been seated an instant before, effacing everything

there, and then continuing on its way of destruction into the depths of the quebrada far below.

They looked at each other—the two whom Death had passed so closely that they had felt his wind stirring their garments. Both were pale, but entirely composed. Isabel spoke first:

“Thank you for being so quick! In another moment—”

“The rock would have been on us,” Lloyd said, a little hoarsely. “That must be my excuse for dragging you away so roughly.”

“As if an excuse were needed for saving my life!” She glanced up at the mountain above them. “What on earth do you suppose sent that boulder down just then?”

“Impossible to say. The disintegrating forces of nature are at work all the time, you know. The quebrada is strewed from end to end with such boulders.”

“I remember.” Her gaze fell into the shadow-filled depths of the great chasm below, and she shuddered a little. “But I didn’t imagine the mountains were still sending them down like this. It is most—inconsiderate.” Her glance suddenly returned to him. “Your sketch, Mr. Lloyd,—what has become of it?”

“It has gone, together with several hundred tons of rock, to assist in filling up the channel of the Tamezula River.”

“Oh, how dreadful!”

"I fancy your friends who are coming yonder would think it still more dreadful if I had saved the sketch and let you go."

In fact, the crashing descent of the rock had brought the entire picnic party streaming out from the patio of the mine to the narrow shelf-like road. Although reassured by the sight of the two figures, they came on to examine the trail of the boulder's descent, and exclaim over the narrow escape of those who had been so directly in its path.

"Mr. Lloyd pulled me aside just in time, papa," Isabel said. "I did not hear the noise, and but for him I should have been crushed; for you see there is no vestige left of the stone on which I was sitting."

Mr. Rivers looked at the spot and then at Lloyd.

"Good thing you had your wits about you," he said to the latter, "else we might search for the remains of both of you down in the quebrada."

"We were just about to summon you to the *tamalas*, señorita, when the fearful noise startled us," said a pretty girl, passing her arm through Isabel's. "Oh, what a fearful shock for you! Would you not like a little *aguardiente*?"

"Oh, no, thanks! I don't feel the least need of *aguardiente*," Isabel answered, smiling.

"But you must take something to sustain you. A cup of chocolate, then?"

Isabel agreed that a cup of chocolate might possibly do her good, so she was led to where the col-

lation was arranged under the shed of the patio. Here a cup of sweet, foaming chocolate and a plate of *tamales* were brought to her. Here also Thornton fetched his refreshments and sat down by her side.

“My nerves haven’t yet recovered from the shock they had,” he said. “We heard the crash, and some one screamed, ‘Oh, the Señorita!’ For one horrible instant I thought the rock had taken *you*. My heart has not recovered its normal action yet.”

Isabel was ungrateful enough to laugh.

“As long as the appetite is normal, the heart doesn’t greatly matter,” she said. “I am very glad not to have been taken by the rock, but I am inconsolable about Mr. Lloyd’s sketch. It was so good!—and he lost it in saving me.”

“It was a pity certainly; but since he couldn’t save both the sketch and yourself, you’ll allow us to think that he made a wise choice.”

“My dear Miss Rivers!”—it was Armistead’s voice on the other side—“what a fearfully narrow escape you had! I’ve just been examining the track of that boulder. It couldn’t have come more straight down the mountain to where you were sitting if it had been aimed at you.”

“Matter does seem to be curiously endowed with malignity sometimes,” Isabel answered. “But fortunately Mr. Lloyd was very quick.”

“Lloyd ought to have known better than to keep you on that narrow shelf, overhung by rocks and overlooking a precipice, while he made sketches.”

“But you see it was I who kept Mr. Lloyd there.”

Miss Rivers' voice had a very perceptible accent of coolness. "He was making the sketch by my request; for how was I to know that unwary strangers were likely to be bombarded with rocks by your inhospitable mountains?" she added, looking at a young Mexican.

"Not strangers alone, *señorita*," the latter hastened to answer. "My horse the other day had an escape from a falling rock as narrow as yours. I left him tied near the mouth of a mine, and he only saved himself by jumping the full length of his *reata*."

"Evidently boulders are no respecters of persons," Thornton commented.

"But the horse didn't lose a beautiful sketch," Isabel added sadly.

"Are you still lamenting that sketch?" Lloyd laughingly asked at her shoulder. "I will make another for you to-morrow, and the morning light on the quebrada will be better than the light we had on it this afternoon."

"Oh, but I would rather have it just as we had it this afternoon," she said quickly, turning toward him. "I want those gathering shadows in the depths that seem to accent all the grandeur, and to give a touch of mysteriousness and awe to the scene. And I also want it as a souvenir of—the occasion. Whenever I look at it I want to remember that instant when we stood—"

"So close together and so close to death," he could

have added, as she paused; but he only said: "I understand. You shall have it just as it was to-day."

"Thank you!" she replied gratefully. And then, before she could add anything else, some one struck the strings of a guitar and began to sing. And what was it but "La Golondrina"?—the same air but different words from those which Victoria had sung at Guasimillas:

"Aben-Hamed al partir de Granada
 Su corazon traspasado sintió,
 Alla en la vega, al perderla de vista
 Con debil voz su tormento expresó,
 'Mansion de amor, celestial Paraiso,
 Nací en tu seno y mil dichas gocé,
 Voy á partir á lejanas regiones,
 Do nunca más, nunca más volveré!"

"Si vera en Abril, en la costa africana,
 La golondrina que de aqui se va
 A donde ira tan alegre y ufana,
 Tal vez su nido á mi casa á labrar.
 Oh! cuanto envidio al mirar que te alejas
 Ave feliz de dicha y de placer
 Mis ecos lleva á mi patria felice
 Que nunca más, nunca más volveré!"

Dusky shades were by this time gathering around them, so that they could not see one another's faces very well as the voice rang out its pathetic refrain. Isabel had always thought it pathetic, but something in the time and place seemed to cause a sudden tension of her heartstrings—

Never more, never more return!

How the words echoed!—and how much the falling strain was like the sob of a hopeless sorrow! There are so many Granadas in life to which we shall never return; places where the sun shines, the flowers bloom, the fountains play, but where our steps will never enter again. She felt this as she was sure Lloyd was feeling it; for she heard him suddenly sigh in the silence which followed when the music ceased. Then he rose to his feet with a quick movement. What he was thinking was that surely he was mad to linger here—he of all men! For what exile is so hopeless as that which a man has wrought and ordered for himself? And having wrought, having ordered it, what folly to turn a vain gaze of longing toward the fair city of lost opportunity, where he had left forever youth and joy, love, hope and ambition!

Silently as a shadow he turned and went away. But as he passed alone down the mountain path where twilight had fallen, while over the giant crests of the encompassing heights stars were gleaming here and there in the lovely sky, the sound of voices and laughter followed him. The merrymakers had left the mine and were also wending their way homeward. Through the still, clear air their gay words and jests reached him distinctly. And then some one began to sing, and now the whole party seemed to join; for again it was the familiar strains of “*La Golondrina*.” The hills gave back the sounds. Nature herself seemed saying:

“*Nunca más, nunca más volveré!*”

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE SIERRA.

WHY the deuce you should be in such a hurry to get away, Lloyd I don't understand."

It was Armistead who spoke, in no very amiable tone, as he sat on the side of his hard, narrow bed in the room the two men occupied together, and watched Lloyd's preparations for departure.

"If you don't understand, it's not because I haven't told you why I'm going," Lloyd replied, rolling up, with the deftness of long practice, a few necessary articles on the *serape* which was to be carried behind his saddle. "I have nothing to do here; and, not being fond of idleness, I am going out to Urbeleja to look after some prospects."

"There might be a good deal for you to do here, if you were not so confoundedly disobliging, and would do it."

"As for example—?"

"To assist me in getting possession of the Santa Cruz Mine."

"I've told you that I can not possibly assist you in that matter. I made that plain to you before we left San Francisco."

"I didn't believe you would really be such a—um—er—"

"Don't hesitate to use the term you consider applicable. I am not thin-skinned and can stand it."

"Well, you must acknowledge that no sensible man would act as you are doing."

"According to your definition of a sensible man, probably not."

"And I consider that you are treating me very badly besides."

"You haven't the faintest right to think so, in view of our positive understanding; but if you do, the remedy is simple—we'll shake hands now and go our different ways."

"And how about those prospects in the Sierra?"

Lloyd shrugged his shoulders as he pulled the straps of his roll tighter.

"The prospects will remain prospects," he said; "at least I shall not expect you to sell them."

Armistead frowned as he looked at the other.

"You are without exception the most pig-headed and impracticable man I have ever known," he said.

"You are ready to throw up a fortune, if half what you say of those prospects is true, rather than help me in a matter that does not concern you in the least."

"It concerns me to hold fast to my own standards of conduct. I don't impose them on any one else, but they are essential to my self-respect."

"Oh, hang your self-respect." Armistead rose,

moved impatiently across the room, then turned sharply around. "When are you coming back to Tópia?" he asked.

"I don't expect to return to Tópia," Lloyd answered. "I have no business here. From Urbeleja I shall go to San Andrés."

"Well, of all—" Words failed Armistead for a moment, as he stood with his hands in his pockets staring at the other. "Haven't you business with *me*? I am not going to give up those mines because you are a quixotic idiot."

"In that case you can meet me at San Andrés, where I must go to see about the titles. I will let you know when I reach there, and you have nothing to keep you here."

"You are mistaken: I have a great deal to keep me here. To get possession of the Santa Cruz Mine is my first business in the country, and I find this is the best place from which to direct operations. Then, since you have failed me, I must depend on the Caridad people for help in certain matters. By the by, are you going away without bidding Mr. and Miss Rivers farewell?"

"Certainly not. I shall call to see them as I leave town. And now"—glancing quickly round—"I believe I am ready for the road. Good-bye, old man! I'm sorry I can't wish you success in the Santa Cruz matter, but I hope you'll come to no personal harm over it."

Armistead lifted his brows.

"To what personal harm could I possibly come?" he asked. "Good-bye. Look out for yourself in that fearful Sierra!"

"Oh, the Sierra and I are old friends!" Lloyd laughed, as he went out to where his horse waited for him.

In the saddle and riding up the street, the stimulating freshness of the morning, with its diamond-like air and brilliant sunshine, seemed to brace both body and spirit like a tonic. And so it was a clear-eyed, self-contained man, with mouth and chin resolutely set, who presently rode with the ease of old familiarity into the patio of the Caridad house, and uncovered at sight of Miss Rivers, who was basking in the sunshine on the corridor.

"O, Mr. Lloyd!" she cried, looking up as his horse's feet rang on the pavement. "How delighted I am to see you! Oddly enough—and yet not oddly at all,—I was just thinking of you."

"Not anything ill, I hope?" he said, as he dismounted and went toward her; thinking, when he met the smile on her lips and in her eyes, what a face to match the morning sunshine hers was.

"Not unless it were for slipping away so mysteriously at the San Benito the other evening and not coming near us since," she answered. "I was just wondering if I should have to send and compel you to come and be thanked for the beautiful sketch of the quebrada you have sent me."

"I am glad if it is what you wanted. It did not satisfy me at all."

"One always finds it difficult to be satisfied with one's work, does one not? I can account in no other way for your not being satisfied with this. You must pardon me for saying that it seems to me much better done than any of your other sketches, of which Mr. Thornton has shown me a good many."

"Has Thornton kept those fragments? Well, if this is much better, it must have been with me as with old Picot, the French carpenter: you put a spirit into us to make us do our best for you."

She looked at him for a moment in silence before she said:

"I should like to put a spirit into you to make you do your best for yourself."

"I am sure you would," he answered, smiling at her—they had by this time sat down in two large chairs facing each other. "I have never seen any one who evidently possessed more strongly the desire of helping lame dogs over stiles. But, you see, sometimes the dog is ungrateful—"

"You are not that, I am sure, Mr. Lloyd."

"And sometimes he is incapable of profiting by the assistance of the kind hand held out to him. That is my case. The time has gone by when I could care to do anything for myself. It is long since I have even particularly cared about making money, which is understood to be the first duty of

an American. But I am going to mend my habits in that particular, at least. I am now on my way into the Sierra to take up some prospects."

"You are on your way into the Sierra!" She glanced at his horse and then across the valley at the eastern heights, where a trail wound upward like a thread to the pass between the crowning cliffs. "I wish I were going with you."

"Needless to say that I wish so, too."

"That is more polite than true, I'm afraid. But I am determined to go some day. I shall make papa take me."

"You are going to see Doña Victoria some day, you know."

"I hope so; but"—she leaned suddenly and eagerly forward—"are *you* going to see Doña Victoria now, Mr. Lloyd? Oh, you don't know how much I have been thinking, wondering how you would contrive to warn her!"

"This seems the only way," he said. "Of course I am not going to see Doña Victoria. I shall simply call at the mine and warn Don Mariano to be on his guard against possible surprise."

"How good, how very good of you to undertake such an errand!"

"Don't give me more credit than I deserve. I am going to Urbeleja, as I told you, about some prospects; and to call at the Santa Cruz will not take me very much out of my way."

"I must believe you, I suppose; but I have my

suspicions that the prospects come in very conveniently just now. And if you see Doña Victoria—”

“May I tell her that she owes the warning to you?”

“I would prefer that you did not. I could not give the warning without betraying confidence, you know. As it is, my conscience is not at all easy about the matter.”

“It should be, then,” said Lloyd, stoutly. “You have told me nothing; in fact, I know nothing of Armistead’s plans. I only suspect what his course of action will be; and I shall merely, in a general way, offer some advice to Don Mariano, which he may or may not heed.”

“Will he not think that you are taking a liberty, and perhaps resent it, if you put the matter that way?”

“Possibly; but that is strictly his affair.”

“No, no: it is our affair also; for we are thinking of Doña Victoria and her mother, and we don’t want them to lose their mine. Take my advice, Mr. Lloyd—perhaps I ought not to give it, but I will,—and make your warning emphatic. Let Don Mariano understand that it rests on knowledge.”

“But Don Mariano would be quite justified in wondering why I should betray the confidence of my friend for the sake of strangers. That is how it would look to him, you see.”

“Yes, I see. It’s rather a difficult matter, isn’t it?”

"Very," said Lloyd, a little dryly; "so difficult that the part of wisdom, if not altruism, would seem to be to stand apart and let the opposing forces fight it out alone."

"Oh, but I can't,—I really can't!" said Miss Rivers, distressedly. "When I think of that man in San Francisco and those poor women in the Sierra, I feel that I must take part in the fight, if I have to go and warn Doña Victoria myself."

"You couldn't possibly do that; but it might, perhaps, help matters if you were to give me a credential."

"In what form?"

"Well, the form of a line or two to Doña Victoria, asking her to heed any warning I may give."

"Do you think she would heed that?"

"I am inclined to think so. I know that you won her liking and trust during your journey up the quebrada."

"I am very glad to hear it. Tell me, then, exactly what you want me to say."

"Something like this, I think: that you feel deep interest and sympathy in her struggle for her rights, and that you hope she will give attention to any advice I may offer her."

Miss Rivers rose eagerly.

"Come into the sala and help me write it," she said. "My Spanish is not faultless, and after '*Muy apreciable Señorita*' I should be at a loss how to proceed."

Lloyd followed her willingly enough into the room she had made so pretty and homelike. He was not sorry to carry away a picture of her as she sat at the desk beside the window and wrote her note, with the light falling on the softly piled masses of her golden-brown hair and the gracious curves of her fair cheek. The few lines which he dictated were, however, soon written; the pale gray sheet, with its stamped monogram and faint violet fragrance, was put into an envelope, addressed to the Señorita Doña Victoria Calderon, and handed to him. And then it was time to go. He rose to his feet, slipping the note into an inner pocket; and as he did so his glance fell on his own sketch of the quebrada, which was placed above the desk. Isabel's glance followed his.

"You see I have it there," she said,—"not only to admire, but to remember how near I was to being carried down into those dark depths. That is why I wanted the shadows of evening—the impression of awe; and you have given it so well. I can never look at it without thinking of the moment you snatched me away and the boulder crashed past us, brushing my dress as it went."

He could not resist the temptation to say:

"I am glad you have it, then; for I shall know that you remember me sometimes, if I should not have the pleasure of meeting you again."

She looked surprised.

"But surely you are not going to stay in the Sierra!" she exclaimed. "You will be back soon?"

"Not very soon, I fear; and it can not be that Tópia will keep you very long."

"You are as bad as papa. Tópia will keep me for a long time yet; and, besides, I am going out into the Sierra. What is to prevent our meeting there?"

"Nothing, except that the Sierra is very wide, and, like the sad-hearted Moor of 'La Golondrina,'

Voy á partir á lejanas regiones."

"Well, I am going into the '*lejanas regiones*' also," she said, nodding determinedly. "Some day when you have climbed a high mountain, you will find that I have been coming up the other side. We shall meet on the top. You will say: 'What! you here!' And I will answer: 'I told you I would come!'"

"Hasten the day!" said he, smiling. "I shall look for you now on the top of every mountain I climb."

"I am sure we shall meet," she said confidently; "but meanwhile I hope you will come back and tell me how you have fared with Doña Victoria. I trust she will heed your warning."

"So do I, for her own sake. And now"—he held out his hand—"good-bye! I suppose I will find Mr. Rivers in the office?"

"If he is not at the mine. Good-bye!" She laid her hand in his. "And—what is it they say here?—*Vaya Vd. con Dios!*"

“Go with God!” The beautiful parting words still rang in his ears after he had climbed the steep heights and paused an instant at the summit of the pass for a last look at Tópia, lying in its green valley three thousand feet below; and then rode onward into the fair, wild, sylvan ways of the great Sierra.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

ON the day after Lloyd's departure from Tópia, Armistead, in fulfillment of his expressed intention to obtain the assistance he needed from "the Caridad people," paid a visit to Mr. Rivers and formally asked this assistance. The Gerente of the Caridad leaned back in his chair and looked grave.

"Well, you see, Armistead," he said, "with every disposition to oblige you personally, it is rather a delicate matter for us to touch. We are living and doing business in this country, and we can not afford to antagonize the feeling of the people. Now, I suppose I don't need to tell you that there's a pretty strong feeling about this Santa Cruz matter."

Armistead shrugged his shoulders.

"That is to be counted on of course, where the claim of an alien and one against—er—women is concerned," he replied.

"Rather more than simply against 'women' in this case, you know, my dear fellow," Mr. Rivers suggested.

"I understand perfectly that it wouldn't do for you to give open assistance, and I am not asking

anything of the kind," Armistead went on; "but I am left in rather a difficult position by Lloyd's defection. He has such scruples, or such fears for himself, in the matter that he has refused to give me the help I need in getting together a force of reliable men to take possession of the mine; for I'm sure you'll agree with me that *that* is the best and quickest way to end the matter."

Mr. Rivers picked up a ruler and tapped meditatively on the desk before which he sat—for this conversation took place in the office of the Caridad.

"Perhaps so," he said guardedly. "It is a point on which I hardly feel qualified to give an opinion. It's a peculiar situation,—very peculiar; and there are—er—many things to take into consideration. I would like to oblige you in any way possible, Armistead; but I really don't think it possible for us to take any part in the business."

"My dear sir," replied Armistead earnestly, "I don't ask you to take part in it further than to recommend some men for my purpose."

"But that's impossible, don't you see?—because the only men for whom I could speak are the men in our employ, and it would never do for any man connected with the Caridad to be concerned in this matter."

"In short," said Armistead, stiffly, "it seems that I can not count on any friendly services from the Caridad. It's not exactly what I looked for—to have

the cold shoulder turned to me by the representatives of an American company."

"I think that we have proved that there is no cold shoulder turned to you personally," Mr. Rivers answered; "and if your business here were of an ordinary character, the Caridad influence and help would be with you. But you must recognize that what you are engaged in is not an ordinary business, but is one in which so much feeling is arrayed against your claim, that I should seriously injure my company with the people if I lent you any assistance. You could not expect me to do that, even if my own sympathy were with you—that is, with Trafford—in the contest; and, frankly, it is not."

Armistead rose to his feet, more angry than he wished to express.

"I see that I have nothing to expect in the way of help here," he said; "so with apologies for having troubled you, I'll bid you good-day."

Mr. Rivers rose also, and laid his hand on the other's arm.

"Be reasonable, Armistead!" he urged. "You are a man of the world, and you certainly must know that Trafford's conduct in this matter is inexcusable. We all like *you* but we can't possibly let our personal liking lead us into lending a hand to as dastardly a business as any man—again I am speaking of Trafford—ever engaged in. But don't go off offended. Come into the house and see Isabel."

If Armistead had been capable just then of smiling, he might have smiled at the tone of the last words. "Come into the house and see Isabel," Mr. Rivers said, much as he might have offered a sugar-plum to an angry child; and with an absolute confidence, too, in the efficacy of the sugar-plum. But Armistead's feelings were too much ruffled to allow of his accepting the invitation. He curtly declined to pass into the patio, toward which Mr. Rivers' gesture invited him; and, turning his back on its possible seductions, walked out of the front door into the street—or, rather, into the road which became presently the main street of Tópia.

Before he reached the first houses of the village, however, he met Thornton, who, followed by a *mozo* with a bag of coin carried on his shoulders as if it were a bag of grain, was on his way to the office; for this was pay-day at the Caridad, and on such days the merchants of Tópia were frequently called upon to give up all their silver in exchange for drafts on Culiacan and Durango. They were very willing to do so, since the drafts of the mine supplied an exchange which there was no bank to supply; and since the coin with which they parted quickly found its way back, through the hands of the miners, into their tillers.

"Hello!" said Thornton, as he met the man swinging at such a rapid pace down the road. "The express isn't due for five minutes yet. Dreaming, weren't you?" he added with a laugh as Armistead

paused. "Thought you were in the Land of Hurry again, I suppose, with a transaction of a million or so to be settled in five minutes over the telephone. See how much better we do business here!" And he waved his hand toward the *mozo*, who halted patiently with the heavy bag of coin on his bent shoulders.

"Send that fellow on! I want to speak to you," said Armistead, impatiently.

"Go on to the office, Dionisio, and tell the Gerente that I will be there in five minutes," said Thornton in Spanish. "He'll not be surprised now if he doesn't see me for half an hour," the speaker added as the *mozo* went on. "Such are the blessings of being in what scoffers call the Land of Mañana. And now what can I do for you?"

"A great deal, if you like," Armistead answered. "In the first place, what will you take to sever your connection with the Caridad and enter into my employ?"

Thornton stared for an instant.

"You aren't in earnest?" he said.

"Do you suppose I ever jest on business?" Armistead demanded. "You've been so long in this wretched country that you've forgotten how men do business—at home. Of course I'm in earnest, and to prove it I'll make you a definite offer. If you come to me, I'll double whatever salary you are getting from the Caridad company, for as long a time as we remain in Mexico; and I'll take you to

California with me when I go, and find you a good position there. How does that strike you?"

"Rather overwhelmingly," Thornton replied. "In fact, the effect is so great on a system which, as you remark, is somewhat debilitated by the methods of business of this country, that I—I think I'll sit down."

He sank as he spoke, with an air of one quite overwhelmed, on the spreading roots of a large tree by the side of the road; and Armistead, frowning at this misplaced levity, followed his example.

"Don't be more of an idiot than you can help," he said, with the frank incivility of an old classmate. "This isn't a time for jesting. I want a man."

"I thought you had one. What has become of Lloyd?"

"He has gone off into the Sierra."

"But isn't he coming back?"

"Not to help me in the business I am here specially to transact."

"And that is—?"

"To get hold of the Santa Cruz Mine. You must know—it appears that everybody knows that."

"Ah!" Thornton looked meditatively at the great heights towering before them. "And why will not Lloyd help you in the matter?"

"For some private reason of his own—probably because he is afraid."

Thornton shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said, "that won't do! I know Lloyd. He isn't afraid of anything."

"He certainly isn't afraid of breaking his contract," Armistead returned. "I found him, dead broke, in the streets of San Francisco, and brought him down here with me on the understanding that he was to give me the aid of his knowledge of the country, the people and the language whenever I needed it. Yet now, when I need it most, he goes off and leaves me in the lurch—for what reason I can't pretend to say. Perhaps he wants to marry the Santa Cruz girl."

"That won't do either. Lloyd isn't a marrying man."

"I don't care what kind of a man he is," Armistead said irritably, "further than that he is not the kind of a man that suits me, or who can be relied on to keep his word. So I want somebody—and want him at once—who has the qualifications I require. I believe that you have them, so I offer you a rare opportunity. Will you take it?"

"I am not sure of possessing the qualifications you are good enough to take for granted," Thornton answered. "You had better tell me what you want me to do."

"The first business I shall want you to undertake will be to assist me in getting together a number of men sufficient to take possession of the Santa Cruz Mine."

"By force?"

"By the same kind of force you would employ in ejecting a tenant from a house he refused to leave. Trafford's title to the mine is good; but the people who are in possession of it now will neither resign possession nor accept any terms of compromise, so there is nothing to do but eject them. I hope to accomplish this without a conflict, if I can succeed in surprising the mine. But I must have a force of men I can rely on, and some one who understands managing Mexicans. You, I think, are the man for the purpose; and therefore I offer you inducements which are very well worth your while to consider."

"They are certainly very considerable inducements," Thornton replied, rising to his feet; "and I am much flattered by your opinion of my qualifications. But I'm obliged to decline your offer. I'll stick to the Caridad, thank you."

Armistead, rising also, regarded him frowningly.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "I never thought that you were distinguished for indifference to your own interest."

"Neither am I," Thornton answered. "I'm as keen for my own interest as most men. But there are some things a man can touch and some he can't. I mean no reflection on you, but I'll be hanged if I touch this business of the Santa Cruz. Good-morning. They'll be looking for me at the office."

As he walked rapidly up the road, Armistead gazed after him with a slightly sardonic expression.

"Some things a man can touch and some he can't!" he repeated. "It's very plain, my good fellow, where your scruples have been developed. Miss Rivers has got in her work pretty well. What a fool a man is to believe that a woman thinks any the better of him for accepting her opinions! Take a high tone, let her understand that she doesn't know what she is talking about, and go your own way—that's the only course to adopt with a woman." He turned and went on toward the town. "Evidently there's no help to be had from anybody connected with the *Caridad*," his thoughts continued; "so where the deuce am I to turn for the assistance I need?"

It was a difficult question to answer, and he was considering it as he walked down the long, narrow street of the town, past the open doors of the one-storied dwellings and shops, until he reached the flowery plaza. Here he sat down on a bench; and, still absorbed in the consideration of his problem, did not observe any of the loungers—few at this hour of the day—who occupied the other benches in sight.

But one person who lounged on a seat not far off observed him closely. This was a man, evidently not a Mexican and probably an American, of dissipated and shabby appearance, but about whom there hung the indefinable and almost ineradicable air of a gentleman. Presently he rose, walked deliberately over to the bench where Armistead was seated, and sat down beside him.

"How do you do, Mr. Armistead?" he said in a refined and educated voice. "I didn't know you were in Mexico."

Armistead started, turned around, and with a single glance took in the condition and probable needs of the man who addressed him. Figuratively, he buttoned his pockets, as he said coldly:

"I don't remember having met you."

"Probably not," the other answered with a faint, bitter smile. "Times have changed with me since we met last. But you'll probably remember me when I tell you that my name is Randolph, and that I was connected with the Silver Queen Mine when you visited it three years ago."

"Oh!" Armistead adjusted his eye-glasses and scrutinized the good-looking, dissipation-ravaged face before him. Of course he remembered the visit to the Silver Queen—a mine in Arizona which had been offered to Trafford,—and the manner in which he had been entertained by the staff of the mine, of whom Randolph was one. Armistead had thought that he knew something of the way in which managers of mines frequently spend the money of toiling capitalist-owners afar, but even his eyes had been opened at the Silver Queen. Such extravagance of expenditure and unchecked dissipation on the part of all concerned he had never seen elsewhere. The staff had left nothing undone to give him "a good time," and the memory of it was not likely to be forgotten. He thought it probable

that he should now have to repay a little of that exuberant hospitality.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Randolph!” he said politely but not more warmly. “Of course I remember you now; but you have—altered a good deal since I saw you then.”

“A little, no doubt,” said Randolph, dryly. “Those were rare old times at the Silver Queen, but the bottom fell out of that when you reported against the mine (rather shabby of you, by the by, considering all the champagne we poured out to give you a rosy view of it); and since then I’ve found it rather hard to find or keep a good position.”

Armistead did not think this remarkable, but forbore to say so.

“You have been long in Mexico?” he asked.

“I’ve been at one or two mines, but—didn’t stay. Yes”—as he caught Armistead’s significant glance, —“of course you can see what the trouble is. My habits are bad.”

“That’s a pity,” said Armistead. “No man with bad habits can keep employment very long, you know.”

“If I had ever doubted the fact, my experience lately would have convinced me of it, so I’ve sworn off—no, not in the usual way. I believe I’ve a little will-power left; and it’s life or death with me now to exert it. I have got as far down as a man can go and not be a beggar. I haven’t come to that yet, though I’ve seen ever since I sat down here that it’s

what you are afraid of. *Don't* be afraid. I've no intention of asking you for money; but I would like some work, if you have any to give."

A singular expression came over Armistead's face. He did not reply immediately, but gazed at the other for a moment with eyes so keen and cold that they seemed searching him through and through. Then he said slowly:

"It's a little odd. I am just now in need of a man to do some work for me, and I have not known where to find him. You might do—if I could have any assurance that you would keep sober."

"I can give you no other assurance than my promise," Randolph answered. "But, as I've told you, it's a life and death fight with me now; and if I fail, the remedy's in your own hands. You can discharge me."

"I should certainly do that without a moment's hesitation," said Armistead, coldly. "Meanwhile I'll give you a trial." He rose as he spoke. "Come to my room. We can settle matters there."

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE SANTA CRUZ.

THE Santa Cruz Mine, over which such conflicting interests were struggling, and around which old wrongs, exasperations and bitterness were waking to new life, lay deep in one of those mountain fastnesses where Nature seems to delight in hiding her richest treasures. The only practicable approach to it was by a cañon which opened out of the valley of Las Joyas, and, with a contrast common in the Sierra, was as stern and wild of aspect as the plain was gentle and pastoral. A narrow road or trail—it was no more than the last,—worn by the passing feet of innumerable mules and men, wound along the side of the cañon, with precipitous heights rising above; while below there was a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to dark, green depths, into which no ray of sunlight ever pierced, and where an unseen stream filled the chasm with the tumult of pouring waters. Wild enough at its outset, the gorge grew wilder as it penetrated farther into the heart of the giant hills, until at length it terminated in a natural cul-de-sac, where a great mountain, like a couchant lion, closed the way, and where, high in the side of this height, lay the Santa Cruz Mine.

Six hundred feet above the bottom of the gorge, into which the stream, leaping in a white cataract down an arroyo, plunged with a thunderous roar, was the arched entrance of the main tunnel into the mine; and before this the patio for the sorting of ores, buttressed on its outer side by an enormous dump of waste rock. And here, crowning a mass of boulders, stood a tall cross, the first object to meet the gaze of any one advancing up the cañon.

“In hoc signo vinces!” Lloyd murmured to himself, as he rounded a turn of the gorge and caught sight of the great symbol, so high uplifted and so impressively relieved against the mountain side. He felt himself suddenly thrilled, not only by its marvellous picturesqueness, towering at the head of this mountain defile, and by the poetry of the faith which placed it there, but also by a conviction that it stood as an omen of victory for those who held the mine beneath it. The words of Doña Beatriz recurred to his memory. “I swear by the holy cross that stands over the mine!” she had said. And what she swore was that neither the man who claimed it nor any one whom he sent should ever possess the Santa Cruz. At this moment Lloyd, too, could have sworn that they never would. For, as he walked his horse along the narrow way, with the roar of the torrent below filling his ears, the stern heights encompassing him and the majestic cross dominating the wild grandeur of the scene, he saw how admirably situated the mine was for defense, com-

manding as it did the head of the cañon, with no other way of approach than the trail which he was following, and which, winding along the side of the gorge, finally entered the patio on a level. Unless surprised, the Santa Cruz could never be taken by force, if those who held it were minded to resist. And that they would be so minded he could not doubt, knowing as he did the indomitable temper of one at least of the women who were its possessors. It was impossible not to smile at the thought that Trafford, whose progress had been so triumphant for many years, and whose road to fortune had been marked by the ruin of whoever opposed him, might now at last have a taste of defeat at the hands of his own daughter.

“But they should not allow a stranger to ride unchallenged into their patio!” he thought impatiently, as he entered, and looked over a scene of a kind very familiar to him—men bringing ore out of the mine; groups of boys seated on the ground rapidly breaking and sorting it into heaps, from which numbers of mules were being loaded, to carry all, save what was known as the export ore, down to the arrastras at the mouth of the cañon, for reduction by the ancient process of Mexico.

It was a busy and animated scene; and so absorbed was each person in his particular occupation that it was several minutes before any one approached the newcomer, who, drawing up his horse, quietly waited. Presently a young man, detaching

himself from a group of men and mules, came forward. It was not altogether a pleasant surprise that he proved to be Arturo Vallejo, who on his part was evidently astonished as unpleasantly as possible by the sight of Lloyd.

“*Buenos días, señor!*” he said coldly and with evident suspicion. “You have business here—in the Santa Cruz?”

“Else I should not be here, señor,” Lloyd answered. “I wish to see your father, Don Mariano Vallejo.”

“My father is just now in the mine, señor. But I am in charge of the patio. You can tell me your business.”

“I would prefer to speak to Don Mariano,” said Lloyd. “With your permission, I will wait for him.”

The words were civil enough, but it was, perhaps, the manner of the other which exasperated Arturo. At all events, his reply was distinctly rude:

“It can not be permitted, señor, that you shall stay here. We do not allow strangers—who may be enemies or spies—in our patio.”

“A very good rule,” returned Lloyd, coolly; “but it would be better if you took more precautions to enforce it. You should certainly not permit a stranger to ride, as I have done, unchallenged into your patio.”

The young man flushed angrily. The admonition, so plainly justified, would not have been agreeable

coming from any one. Coming from this source, it was intolerable.

"I stand in no need of advice from you," he said haughtily. "We are able to take care of ourselves. You would not have entered if the watchman had not been off guard just then. It is, however, impossible that you can be allowed to remain."

"In that case," said Lloyd, with the same exasperating coolness, "I will trouble you to say to Don Mariano when he comes out of the mine that I will see him at Las Joyas."

This was something Arturo had not anticipated.

"At Las Joyas!" he repeated violently. "It is impossible—you can not venture to intrude there!"

Lloyd smiled.

"You may be in charge of the patio of the Santa Cruz, Don Arturo," he said, "but I hardly imagine that you are in charge of Las Joyas. Kindly give my message to your father."

He was about to turn his horse, when the young Mexican laid a quick hand on the rein.

"I may not be in charge of Las Joyas, señor," he cried, "but I feel it my duty to prevent such an intrusion on the ladies who are there alone. If you must see my father, you can wait in the office yonder"—he waved his hand toward a small building beside the mouth of the tunnel—"until he comes out of the mine."

"You are extremely kind," said Lloyd, with subdued sarcasm; "but I think it will perhaps be better if I go—"

“To Las Joyas,” he was about to add when the words were stopped on his lips by the appearance of a figure which suddenly rode into the patio. It was a feminine figure, rebozo-shrouded about the head and shoulders, but not so closely that it was possible to mistake the beautiful face and eyes of Victoria Calderon. As she entered, she halted, lightly and easily without assistance from her saddle to the ground, and called a boy from one of the ore heaps to take her mule. At the same moment Lloyd also dismounted and advanced quickly toward her.

“Doña Victoria,” he said, “I am happy to meet you!”

She started as she turned toward him, extreme surprise in her face and manner, but, as he felt at once, no trace of suspicion.

“Señor Lloyd!” she exclaimed. “It is very unexpected to meet you here.”

“I am sure of it,” he answered. “I am here to see Don Mariano, but I am told that he is in the mine just now.”

“But no doubt they have also told you that he never remains there very long,” she said. “So you can wait a little, or”—she looked at him with sudden keenness,—“if your business relates to the mine, you can transact it with me. It is as you like.”

“It is as *you* like, rather,” he said. “My business certainly relates to the mine; but it was because I was unwilling to disturb your mother and yourself

that, instead of going to Las Joyas, I came here to see Don Mariano."

"Whatever concerns the mine concerns my mother and myself first of all, señor," she replied; "and you need not have hesitated to disturb us. What is your business? Do you, perhaps, bring some message from the man who is trying to take the mine from us?"

"No, señorita. I have no connection with Mr. Armistead in the matter of the Santa Cruz, and bring no message from him. I shall be glad to tell you what I have come to say to Don Mariano. But"—he glanced at the people around them—"can we not find a more quiet place in which to talk?"

At this moment Arturo approached them.

"I have told the señor that he can wait for my father in the office," he said stiffly to Victoria.

"It is not necessary that he should wait; he can speak to me," she rejoined, with an air of authority which somewhat amused Lloyd. "Give your horse to José," she said to the latter, indicating the boy who had taken her mule; "and we will find a place to talk."

She turned as she spoke, not toward the office as he expected, but in the opposite direction,—toward the outer edge of the patio, which, being enlarged by the vast accumulation of waste rock from the mine, sharply overhung the mountain side. Here, on a pile of timbers awaiting use, she sat down. There was no thought of the surroundings in her mind,

but Lloyd could not but be struck by them: the great heights towering into the burning blue of the jewel-like sky, the thunder of leaping waters, the strong sunlight smiting the rocks and pines and wealth of verdure in the wild gorge below. It all made a frame of stupendous grandeur and picturesqueness for the busy scene around the mouth of the mine and for the figure of the girl, whose face looked up at him out of the blue folds of her rebozo with steady dark eyes.

"Will you not sit down, *señor*?" she said. "This is a good place to speak, for no one can overhear you here."

"Thanks, *señorita*!" he answered. And as he seated himself beside her on the timbers, he drew from his pocket the pale gray note with its faint violet fragrance, which seemed to bring Isabel Rivers' personality before him. "As I have said, I did not expect to have the pleasure of meeting you," he went on; "but, nevertheless, on the chance of doing so, I thought it best to bring this."

With a wondering expression she took the note; and the wonder had evidently deepened when, after reading it, she looked at him again.

"This," she said, "is from the *señorita Americana* —the daughter of the Gerente of the Caridad, with whom I travelled up the quebrada?"

"The same," Lloyd answered. "Miss Rivers remembers you so well that she hoped you would also remember her."

"I remember her very well, señor; but I do not understand why she should write to me and ask me to trust you, whom I have had no thought of distrusting."

"You are very good to say so, señorita; but we—Miss Rivers and myself—could not be sure of that; for we remembered that you had only seen me when I was with the man whom you regard as your enemy—"

"He is our enemy," she interposed quickly; "but you, even when you were with him, proved yourself our friend."

"I certainly felt as your friend," Lloyd answered; "but I had so little opportunity to prove myself one that I should not have been surprised if you had distrusted me—perhaps as much as Don Arturo does," he added, with a smiling glance in the direction of that highly indignant young man.

"Arturo is a boy," said Victoria, who was probably three or four years his junior. "It is unnecessary that you should think of him. I would have trusted you without this letter; so now you can tell me at once what it is you have come to say."

"Briefly, then, I have come to warn you that it is Mr. Armistead's intention to surprise the mine and take possession of it by force."

"Ah! He thinks that he can!" A flash of fire leaped now into the dark eyes. "You have learned this from himself, señor?"

"No," Lloyd replied; "for in that case I could not have told you. I have learned or divined it from an outside source, which left me free to warn you. But I do not think there is any doubt of his intention; and if he succeeds, you will never recover your mine. Your only hope, as matters stand, is in keeping possession of it. Surely you must know this."

"We do know it," she said sternly; "and we are ready to fight any one who comes to take it."

"You will have no chance to fight if Armistead carries out his plan. Do you not understand? The mine will be *surprised*. Some night men will steal into your patio, overpower the watchman and take the mine. After that you can never retake it; for those who will then be in possession will not only use every precaution against surprise, but they will have the law on their side."

"You are mistaken. We would take it from them if we had to bring every man in the Sierra to do it!" Victoria cried passionately. "But there is no need to consider that; for they shall never obtain possession of it."

"Then," Lloyd said gravely, "you must keep better guard. I, a stranger, rode unquestioned into your patio. Why might not a hundred men do the same?"

She stared at him for a moment, and as she drew her dark brows together over her blazing eyes, he saw all the imperious force of her character written in her face.

"It shall never happen again," she said. "If it does, everyone in charge shall go on the instant. Yonder is Don Mariano now. Wait for me a moment, señor."

She rose and walked rapidly away to the mouth of the tunnel, where Don Mariano had indeed appeared and was standing, giving some orders. Lloyd watched her draw him aside and speak for a few minutes with low-toned vehemence, and evidently to his great surprise; then both turned and came toward him.

The bronzed, grave Mexican greeted Lloyd with a certain stiffness in his courtesy. It was plain that he thought the warning which had been given the impetuous young woman at his side should have been reserved for his ear.

"Doña Victoria tells me that you have done us a great service, señor," he said, after they had shaken hands. "Have you reason to be certain of what you have told her—that it is intended to take possession of the Santa Cruz by means of a surprise?"

"I have very good reason to be certain of it, señor," Lloyd answered. "But even if I had not such reason," he could not forbear adding, "I should know that it would be the thing most likely to be attempted, and therefore to be guarded against."

"The Santa Cruz is well guarded, señor. We have many rifles in that office yonder."

"Rifles are only of use in the hands of men,"

Lloyd replied a little dryly. "You will pardon me for saying that after your mine had been taken they would be of little service to you. I do not, however, wish to take the liberty of offering advice: I am simply here to give a friendly warning. As Doña Victoria has probably told you, I have reason to believe that Mr. Armistead's plan is to take possession of the mine by a surprise, and so avoid the long delay of legal action. I need not tell you that he relies upon the strength of Mr. Trafford's title to hold the mine after he has obtained possession of it."

"He will never obtain possession of it," answered Don Mariano, grimly; "especially since you have been kind enough to put us on our guard," he added, with the air of one who acknowledges an obligation which is not altogether to his taste. "Perhaps we have been a little careless—we have gone on in our accustomed manner, forgetting the treacherous ways of the gringos—"

"All gringos are not treacherous," Victoria interposed quickly. "Señor Lloyd has come here to warn us against his own countryman, to do us a service which we can not repay. But for him we might—I believe that we should—have lost the mine." She turned to Lloyd, her eyes now all melting and glowing. "How can we thank you, señor?"

"I am sufficiently thanked, señorita, if the warning I have given proves of service to you," he answered. "Do not forget that you have some one

else to thank besides me.” He glanced as he spoke at the note still in her hand.

“Ah, yes: the señorita! Will you assure her of my gratitude?”

“I am not returning to Tópia, so I shall not see Miss Rivers again. But I hope that you will see her yourself.”

“How can that be, señor? Neither am I going to Tópia.”

“I think, if you will allow me to say so, that nothing would give Miss Rivers more pleasure than to visit Las Joyas.”

Victoria looked surprised.

“Do you think it possible that she would care to come into the Sierra?” she asked.

“I am sure that she would be delighted to do so,” Lloyd answered confidently.

“Then I will write and ask her to come. But you, señor,—you will go now to Las Joyas? My mother will wish to see and thank you.”

Nothing, however, was further from his wishes or intentions than to go to Las Joyas for the thanks of Doña Beatriz. In fact, all that he now desired, having accomplished his errand, was to get away as speedily as possible.

“Many thanks, señorita!” Lloyd answered, beckoning the boy who held his horse to bring the animal up; “but it is not possible for me to have the pleasure of going to Las Joyas at this time. May I

beg that you will present my respectful salutations to Doña Beatriz and assure her—”

But Victoria interrupted his compliments ruthlessly.

“You are going away—after what you have done for us—without entering our house!” she exclaimed. “That is impossible, señor,—I can not allow it.”

He held out his hand, smiling.

“I am going to San Andrés, and have come out of my way to visit Santa Cruz; so now I must get on quickly. Another time I will have the pleasure of visiting Las Joyas.”

“When the *señorita Americana* comes?”

“Hardly then, I fear; but later, perhaps. And now *adios, señorita!* *Adios, señor!* My best wishes for your success in holding the mine.”

A few minutes later he was again on the mountain trail, with the great cross of the Santa Cruz behind him, and the memory of a pair of very reproachful dark eyes accompanying him.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE TRAIL.

AT that point in the winding gorge where the first and last view of the cross over the mine was to be obtained, Lloyd turned in his saddle for a final glance at the picturesque scene dominated by the great symbol; and then rode on, only to be surprised, if not startled, a minute later, by the sudden appearance of a man in the road before him.

There would have been nothing surprising in this if the man, like himself, had been following the trail; but he sprang down the mountain side into the path; and this *Fra Diavolo* mode of appearing is, in the Sierra, likely to startle all but those of the strongest nerves. Lloyd's nerves were strong as nerves are made; but when the agile figure landed on the road, his hand quickly and instinctively went to the revolver which, like everyone else in the country, he carried attached to a belt buckled around his waist. He did not draw it, however; for the next moment he saw that the man was Arturo Vall-ejo, who had taken a short cut across the hill and so intercepted him. His hand left the pistol, but the lines of his face settled sternly as he drew up

his horse; for the young man paused directly in the narrow way.

“Have I forgotten anything, that you are good enough to follow me, Don Arturo?” he asked. “There should be some important reason to excuse your appearing in this manner before a horseman on a dangerous trail.”

“Yes, you have forgotten something, señor,” Arturo answered, with tone and manner offensive in the extreme. “You have forgotten to apologize to me.”

“For what, may I ask?” Lloyd inquired, with the calmness which always angered the other more than rudeness could have done.

“For your insults—your insolence!” Arturo replied, speaking with set teeth and flashing eyes. “You come—as a spy I believe—to the mine which you are helping your countryman to steal; and refuse to tell your business to any one but a woman, a girl whom it is easy to deceive; but I am a man, and I will not submit—”

“I should call you a foolish boy,” interposed Lloyd, with cool contempt. “Be kind enough to get out of my way. I have no time to waste on you, and no desire to do you any injury.”

The tone, even more than the words, infuriated Arturo. He made a step forward and seized the bridle of Lloyd’s horse.

“You will not go until you apologize to me!” he cried passionately; “until you explain why you have dared to come to the Santa Cruz—”

Forbearance had plainly ceased to be a virtue. The threatening voice, the hand from which the horse reared back, suddenly roused in Lloyd an anger which, when roused, was all the more fierce for his ordinary quietude.

“Take your hand from my rein,” he commanded, “or I will knock you down to teach you better manners!”

It is unnecessary to record the reply. Spanish is a language as rich in terms of vituperation and insult as in everything else, and what followed was extremely simple. Lloyd leaned forward, his hand shot out, and Arturo went down.

But he was on his feet again in a moment—for to ride over him was impossible,—clinging to the bridle of the now almost uncontrollable horse, and, in a paroxysm of fury, trying to drag Lloyd out of the saddle. Under ordinary circumstances he might as well have tried to drag from its base a rock like that against which Fitz-James set his back; but the narrow ledge was a fearfully perilous place for such a struggle, and Lloyd felt that in another instant he and his horse would go crashing down the mountain side together. To dismount was the only hope of saving himself and at the same time of ridding himself of this young wild-cat, for such he seemed.

To dismount from a plunging animal on a shelf only a few feet wide was, however, extremely difficult and dangerous, even if his assailant had not

to be reckoned with. It did not even occur to him to use his pistol against the latter; for, as he had truly said, he had no desire to injure him seriously, but only to be rid of him as expeditiously as possible. So, taking his foot from the stirrup, he was in the act of leaping from the saddle, when a plunge of the horse and a blow from Arturo, coming together, sent him backward over the precipice—down—down.

At the same moment the frightened horse, tearing his rein from the hand of the startled assailant, dashed off wildly along the trail, the loud rush of his flying hoof-beats mingling with the crashing sound with which the man fell through the under-growth that covered the steep hillside. As both sounds died away, an awful silence followed,—a silence in which Arturo stood aghast, a picture of consternation and terror. After a minute, which seemed to him an age of fearful listening, he approached the edge of the abyss and peered over. A few broken boughs and bushes near the edge showed where Lloyd had first fallen, but of his farther progress no sign was to be seen from above. The green verdure of the mountain covered the path his body had made as completely as the ocean covers all trace of the swimmer who has sunk beneath its waves. Somewhere down there in the sunless depths of the gorge—perhaps on the rocks, perhaps in the stream that filled the stillness with its voice—he lay, senseless, of course; dead, almost certainly.

White and shaking, Arturo drew back. What, he asked himself, could he do? Surely this was a terrible and unlooked-for result to have followed so simple a thing as demanding an apology for an insult. But it was an accident,—purely an accident. The man's horse had thrown him,—might have thrown him if he, Arturo, had never appeared. Why, then, should he allow his connection with the accident to be known? There could not be the least doubt that the man was dead. To entertain any doubt of this, to seek assistance and make a search for him, would be to confess his own knowledge and how it was obtained. That he felt to be out of the question. Every instinct of his shrinking soul prompted him to fly from the spot and to be silent. The man might in time be missed and his body found—or it might not. The last was more probable; for no one ever entered, it was hardly likely that any one ever would enter, the wild depths below. And for his share in the deed there were no witnesses. He looked guiltily around, sweeping the green, silent mountain sides with his glance, and turning it half-fearfully, half-defiantly, toward the brilliant sapphire sky, where he knew well one Witness sat. Then, with a wild, overmastering impulse of flight, he turned and the next moment was following in the track of the flying horse down the gorge.

An hour later Victoria left the mine. She was alone as she had come; and, while her mule paced

slowly but sure-footedly along the narrow trail, her thoughts were with the man who had so lately preceded her on this road. She was oppressed by a sense of obligation toward him which had found no adequate expression; for after Lloyd's departure, inquiry into the precautions taken against surprise fully revealed the fact that his warning had indeed saved the mine from easy capture. And he, a stranger, a gringo, had come to give them this warning, and then had gone away without any return for so great a service! This was what she was saying to herself with a passionate regret, which was not lessened by the recollection that Lloyd had put aside thanks and refused to accept even hospitality. It was characteristic of her ardent, self-willed nature that, despite this fact, she was considering how she could reach and force him to allow them to discharge in some way the obligation under which he had placed them. "Obstacles: things to be overcome," was a formula which so far in life had expressed her practice, if not her theory; and she had no intention of being daunted now in her determination to express the deep and growing sense of gratitude which burned within her.

But, absorbed as she was in these thoughts, she was not so much pre-occupied with them, as to fail to observe certain significant signs when she reached the point on the road where Arturo had waylaid Lloyd. She drew up her mule sharply, and looked with surprise at the deep prints of iron-shod hoofs

where Lloyd's horse had struggled, reared, and partially slipped backward over the edge of the precipice, recovering himself only at the cost of several inches of the path. Noting this, her quick eye also perceived the broken and crushed growth on the mountain side below. Clearly something or somebody had fallen there. Her glance swept the road as it lay before her; and, seeing there also the deep indentations of the horse's hoofs as he started on his frantic run, she knew that *he* had not gone down into the gorge. What, then, had fallen? She sprang from her saddle and, advancing as close to the edge as safety would permit, passed her arm around a tree to preserve herself from falling, and, leaning over, gazed anxiously downward.

Suddenly she uttered a cry. Her keen glance described something which had entirely escaped Arturo's shrinking observation. This was Lloyd's hat, lodged in the branches of a shrub where he had first fallen. Instantly she knew that it was he—the man of whom she had been thinking with so deep a sense of the service he had rendered her—who lay in the dark, green depths far below. For a moment horror unnerved her, and she clung to the tree, shuddering and sick. She did not ask herself how such a thing could have occurred, what could have startled the horse, or how so good a horseman could have been unseated. Those questions would present themselves later; just now she only thought of the terrible fact that Lloyd had plainly gone

down where it did not seem possible that any man could fall and live.

She made the sign of the cross and her pale lips quivered in prayer for a moment. Then, bracing herself with a strong effort as she drew back from the verge of the abyss, she asked herself what was the first thing to do—or, rather, how best to set about that first thing, which was to reach and recover, whether dead or alive, the man who lay below. Seizing the rein of her mule, she was about to spring into the saddle again, when around the shoulder of the height which hid the mine from view came the train of animals laden with ore for the *hacienda de beneficio* at the mouth of the gorge. She threw up her hand, and the gesture, together with a quick word of command, brought the train to a halt; the string of mules stood still, while the men in charge of them hastened forward to her.

“See!” she said, pointing to the hoof-prints at the edge of the road, the broken boughs and hat below. “The *señor* who came to the mine a little while ago has fallen there. We must get him. Run back to the mine—you, Salvador—and tell Don Mariano to come quickly, to bring ropes and his best men.”

“*Si, señorita,*” answered Salvador, and was gone like a flash.

The other men meanwhile scrutinized eagerly the signs pointed out to them and agreed as to their significance.

"Yes, yes, it is true," they said: "a man has certainly fallen there,—*pobrecito!*"

And then one of them drew attention to another telltale sign in the road—the print of boot-heels ground deeply into the soil, which, being a rich, black loam, never became very hard.

"*Miré!*" he cried. "The señor dismounted, he struggled with his horse, and in the struggle was thrown down the hillside,—it is plain!"

"Yes, it is plain," they agreed again.

But as Victoria looked at the marks indicated, a sudden fear clutched her heart. What if those were not Lloyd's footprints? What if he had been waylaid and assaulted, killed perhaps, almost at the gate of the Santa Cruz? And if this were so, who had assaulted him? Certainly no man of the lower class; for all these wore the ordinary sandals of the country, which have no heels, being simply flat pieces of leather, cut out roughly to suit the foot and tied on with leather strings. All the men around her now wore such sandals, all the miners wore them, and all the workmen at the *hacienda de beneficio*. If, therefore, the footprints were not Lloyd's, they were those of some other man who wore boots; and at the Santa Cruz only three men wore these—Don Mariano, the foreman of the mine, and Arturo. She tried to recollect if Arturo had been at the mine when she left it. She could not recall having seen him; but if he were there, he would certainly come now with the party of rescue. Surely,

surely they were slow, this party of rescue! She wrung her hands together in her impatience.

“Run, Silvio,—run!” she said to another of the men. “Tell them to make haste!”

“They are coming now, señorita!” called out a man who was watching at the turn of the road.

A moment later they appeared—a number of men bearing coils of rope, and followed by Don Mariano, but not by Arturo. So much she saw at once, then dismissed him from her mind and gave all her attention to the work to be done. Don Mariano, who had been exceedingly incredulous when he received the message delivered by the panting Salvador, was quickly converted to her opinion when he saw the broken boughs and Lloyd’s hat on the mountain side.

“I fear there is no doubt he is down there,” said Don Mariano; “and if so, he is certainly dead.”

“Dead or alive, we must find him!” cried Victoria. “Quick!—who will go down?”

Half a dozen volunteered. Don Mariano selected three men—lean, muscular, lithe as greyhounds, noted even among their comrades for the great strength which distinguishes the native Mexican. These, taking ropes with them, the ends of which were held by those above, let themselves over the edge of the precipice and went down its almost perpendicular side with the mountaineering skill of true sons of the Sierra. Following Lloyd’s track, they were soon lost to sight in the dense foliage; but

their path could be traced by the sounds with which they broke through the undergrowth as they went downward.

The group above listened and waited in almost complete silence. Now and again a man spoke in a low tone to his neighbor, setting forth how he would have proceeded; or some one uttered a pious ejaculation as the sounds coming up from below made everyone start with fear lest one of the rescuers had lost his footing and fallen to the rocks and torrent; for on entering into the thick growth they had discarded the ropes, which lay slackly on the hill-side. How long this suspense lasted no one knew; but presently a prolonged shout far below brought to every lip the cry, "They have found him!"

Then the question, *how* had they found him—dead or alive? It was a question impossible to answer, however, until that slow, laborious ascent, hidden from sight but audible to the ear, which now began, should be over. Don Mariano alone uttered a word of hope.

"They found him not more than halfway down the mountain," he said. "He must have been stopped by some tree strong enough to support his body; so there is a chance—barely a chance—that he may be alive."

It seemed a chance hardly worth hoping for; but when the men, after their toilsome climb in the gloomy depths of verdure, came once more into sight, their first shout to those above them was: "He lives!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ARTURO FACES AN ACCUSER.

EVERYONE agreed that it was hardly less than a miracle. For when Lloyd's insensible form had been brought again to the road from which he had fallen—drawn by ropes from above and supported by his rescuers below,—it was found that he was not only living, but apparently without serious injury. At least there were no bones broken; although how serious the injury to the brain might be it was, of course, impossible to tell. Evidently he had been immediately deprived of consciousness by falling on his head; and his body had then crashed downward through the dense growth until stopped by the heavy, outspread branches of a great pine, in which it was found lodged, half-way down the mountain side.

“I do not think that his skull is fractured,” said Don Mariano, after feeling all over the head. “It is marvellous that a man could fall so far and break no bones, unless—” He paused and put his hand to the back of the neck, knowing himself unable to detect injury there, but knowing, also how fatal such injury would be. “It is possible that he is only suffering from a shock to the brain,” he added, looking at

Victoria, who knelt on the other side of the prostrate figure. "He may recover consciousness after a time, perhaps. We will take him to the mine—"

"No," interrupted Victoria quickly. "He must be taken to Las Joyas."

"To Las Joyas! That is too far," Don Mariano objected.

"Far or near is the same to him," she answered; "and it is better he should be taken there at once. Do you think"—she flashed an indignant glance at her elderly relative—"that I will allow a man who has just done us so great a service to lie without care or attention at the mine?"

"Then we can take him down to the *hacienda de beneficio*," said Don Mariano. "There are good quarters there."

"He shall be taken to Las Joyas—nowhere else," she said, rising from the ground as she spoke. "Let the men make a litter on which to carry him."

Don Mariano rose also, with an air of strong disapproval; but he knew his impetuous young kinswoman too well to utter further remonstrance.

"Come!" he said to the men grouped around; and walked away toward the mine, followed by them.

Left alone, Victoria knelt again by the unconscious man and gazed with passionate anxiety into his white, still face. Through the thick foliage of the trees overshadowing the narrow way, some rays of sunshine flickered down on them—on the outstretched, motionless form of the man, on the pale,

tragic face of the girl—and seemed to mock, as sunshine in its gladness always seems to do, the suggestions of tragedy in the scene. Steadfast and calm—with that unchanging calmness of the hills, which is a better type of eternity than the restless ocean,—the great forest-clad heights around looked down, the stainless turquoise sky spread its dazzling expanse above, and only the unceasing voice of the stream, fretting over the rocks far below, filled rather than broke the solemn silence.

How long the interval of waiting lasted, Victoria did not know. During these moments something new and strange, a feeling such as she had never known before, was born within her. What there was in the face on which she gazed, beside its piteous deathliness of aspect—what lines of pain, now clearly to be traced,—to produce the passion of pity which merged into a flood of tenderness, she did not ask. Who does ask when that powerful influence which we call the heart is suddenly, deeply, strongly touched? It is an almost terrible truth that over the rise of these tides of feeling from their unknown depths, we have no control; although it rests with us afterward to resist or throw open all our gates of being to them. But the time for such decision had not yet come to the girl, in whom swiftly and irresistibly a flood of emotion rose, as she looked at the man who had, perhaps, lost his life as a result of bringing to the Santa Cruz the warning which had saved it.

And beside pity, pain and tenderness, indignation possessed her. For more and more she was convinced that this which had happened was no result of accident. And if it were not, if Lloyd had been waylaid and assailed, who could have been his assailant save Arturo? She recalled the bitterness with which he had spoken of Lloyd on his return from Tópia. "I met that gringo called Lloyd in the plaza," he said, "and he tried to make me betray my business to him. Then, when I told him that Mexicans were not such fools as he supposed, he insulted me." And again, only an hour or two ago in the patio of the Santa Cruz, had not Lloyd himself called her attention to young Vallejo's angry face? There was no doubt whatever that Arturo, to whom no one took the trouble to explain matters, had deeply resented the visit of the obnoxious gringo to the mine; and, knowing him as she did, Victoria had very nearly an exact idea of what had happened later—of the passion which made him follow Lloyd—of the altercation—struggle—*this!* She had no belief that he had deliberately intended to injure, much less to kill, a man who had never harmed him. But the result was the same as if intention had directed it; and her own anger toward the agent was also as great as if he had been aware of the black ingratitude of his deed.

It was such thoughts as these which occupied her mind and gave its tragic intensity to her face as she knelt on the forest path, her lips murmuring prayers,

her hand now and again laid gently on the brow of the insensible man. Would those eyes, which but a little while before had looked so kindly and honestly into her own, ever unclose again? Or had fatal injury indeed been done to the brain, and would this unconsciousness only pass into the deeper unconsciousness of death? There was no one who could answer. Doctors are not to be had in the Sierra. Those who fall ill or are injured there must trust to Nature, greatest of physicians; aided, or perhaps retarded, only by a few simple remedies employed by the people with a large faith and a still larger ignorance. Suddenly she rose again to her feet, threw back her head and listened. There were sounds of voices, tread of approaching feet. The next moment the men from the mine, accompanied by Don Mariano, appeared around the curve of the trail, bearing an improvised litter made of blankets fastened to two long poles. Into this Lloyd was carefully laid; and the ends of the poles were lifted to the shoulders of four men, who, with four more in attendance to relieve them when necessary, started down the gorge. Don Mariano then assisted Victoria to her saddle; and, looking around, beckoned for his own mule (which a boy had brought), with the evident intention of accompanying her. She caught her breath sharply. Here was a means of learning, without direct inquiry, where Arturo was.

“Is it necessary for you to come?” she asked.
“Would it not be better to—send Arturo?”

"He is not at the mine," answered Don Mariano, flinging himself as lightly into the saddle as if his years had been two-score less. "I called for him but he could not be found. He must have gone to the *hacienda de beneficio*; so I will ride with you as far as that, and then send him on, if you are still determined to take the Señor Lloyd to Las Joyas."

"Nothing would induce me to allow him to be taken anywhere else," she answered with decision.

Don Mariano either possessed or had learned the wisdom of abstaining from useless words. He made no reply, and they rode silently, in single file—as the narrowness of the way rendered necessary,—in the rear of the men carrying Lloyd.

Where the cañon opened into the wide valley of Las Joyas stood the *hacienda de beneficio*—an immense enclosure like a fort, its walls twenty or thirty feet high, and each corner bearing a tower loopholed for defence. The memory and tradition of lawless times still abide in Mexico; and a stranger in the land would think it sown with fortresses, like the strongholds of mediæval barons, if he did not know that these erections are peaceful factories and mills. This of the Santa Cruz was no exception to the rule. Only artillery could have gained an entrance into it if the gates were once closed, so strong were the walls within which were the arrastras sheds and buildings for the reduction of the ore. At the end of the cañon the road divided, one trail going to the *casa grande* of Las Joyas, a mile or

two farther down the valley; and the other leading directly to the gates of the *hacienda de beneficio*. Don Mariano turned into the last.

“Ride on,” he said to Victoria. “I will send Arturo immediately, and he will soon overtake you.”

Victoria rode on, but she said to herself that she had little idea that Arturo would overtake her. And she was right: he did not.

The surprise of Doña Beatriz when the procession reached the *casa grande* may perhaps be imagined. But it said much for the genuineness of that virtue of hospitality, which in the Sierra does not merely mean receiving friends or repaying social obligations, but literally fulfilling the divine saying, “I was a stranger and ye took Me in,” that she was ready without question or demur to receive and care for this stranger, whom she had only known as the companion of one who came to do her an injury. It was not until he had been brought in, laid down on the best bed the house afforded, and given every attention within the power or knowledge of the household, that she heard from her daughter the story of their obligation to him.

Then, indeed, had there been anything further in the power of Las Joyas to do, it would have been done; but there was nothing. The few and simple remedies employed usually in cases of illness or accident were plainly useless here. There is, however, one supreme remedy which these people of childlike

faith never fail to employ, and to this Doña Beatriz had prompt recourse.

"If we can do nothing else," she said, "we can pray for him." So, drawing her draperies about her, and followed by all the household except Victoria, who would not leave the bedside, she led the way to the chapel. Here, having lighted some candles before the sweet face of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the group, kneeling on the pavement, began to recite the Rosary.

The sound of their voices came, in a rising and falling murmur of supplication, across the patio to the room where Victoria knelt also by the injured man, her clasped hands resting on the side of the bed, her eyes fastened on his face, her mind striving to follow the prayers. Her mother's voice, which was leading the devotion, she hardly heard; but the full-toned response of the others reached her distinctly: "*Santa Maria, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros pecadores ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte!*" The familiar words came like a constantly recurring strain of music to her ear, as her lips joined in murmuring their syllables. "*La hora de nuestra muerte.*" Was that hour of death near at hand for this man, whose face almost seemed to her fancy to grow more deathlike as she gazed at it? She put out her hand fearfully to see if the fatal chill was upon it, when suddenly a shadow darkened the open door, and, glancing up with a start, she saw Arturo standing in it.

She sprang to her feet, her dark brows drawn, her dark eyes burning with sudden fire.

“You!” she said in a clear, vibrating tone. “Have you come to look at your work?”

Arturo, whose nerves were already sadly shaken, was too confounded to answer for a moment. It was the last thing he had expected—to be met by such words as these. His father’s complete unsuspectingness when, finding him at the *hacienda de beneficio*, he had bidden him ride fast and overtake Victoria and the men carrying Lloyd, made him sure that no one would suspect him. He had therefore, with much inward reluctance but prompt outward obedience, mounted and followed the procession,—being careful, however, not to overtake it. Nothing was further from his wish than to see the injured man, although at the same time he had an intense desire to know his exact condition. When he reached the house, he had waited outside until the sound of the prayers in the chapel told him how the household was engaged; then, supposing that he would find only some servant left with Lloyd, he went to the chamber—to be confronted with avenging fate in the person of Victoria.

“My work!” he at length stammered, while he shrank under her gaze. “I—I do not know what you mean. I have heard that the Señor Lloyd has been hurt by falling into the Santa Cruz cañon, and I have come to see how he is—that is all.”

“Come, then, and see!” said the girl, pointing to

the figure before them. "Come and look! He is not yet dead, but he will be dead soon, no doubt, and you can feel yourself a murderer."

"Victoria!"—it was hardly more than a gasp, for surely this was as terrible as it was unexpected. "What right have you to say such things!—to charge me—"

"With this!" she said, in the same clear, vibrant tone, as he paused and her hand still relentlessly pointed her words. "I charge you with it, because I know, as well as God knows, Arturo Vallejo, that you did it."

"I did not!" In his effort to be emphatic Arturo's voice rose almost into a scream, the harshness of which drowned the murmur of the voices in the chapel. As he paused they floated in again.

"*Ruega por nosotros pecadores—*"

"You are lying!" said Victoria, with the assured severity of a judge rather than of an accuser. "It was you, and no one else, who attacked Señor Lloyd and threw him down the mountain. And you did this on the land of the Santa Cruz, almost within sight of the mine which he has saved for us by the warning he came to give! Oh, I tell you"—and severity rose into passion—"if he dies—and I believe that he will die,—I myself will declare what you have done, and will see that you are punished!"

"*Amen, Jesús!*" came the voices from the chapel, as Arturo, now white and thoroughly shaken, strode forward into the room.

“Victoria,” he said, “you are wrong,—quite wrong. I will swear to you—yes, on the crucifix—that I did not throw him down the mountain. I followed him because he had insulted me; and we were talking—quarrelling, if you like,—oh, I will admit that!—and he attempted to dismount and his horse threw him into the cañon. Then I thought he was killed, and I—ran away.”

“*Ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte!*” the chorus floated in as Victoria regarded the speaker with flashing, scornful eyes.

“I know you ran away,” she said. “You are a coward as well as—worse. By your own admission you did a more cowardly and cruel thing than if you had killed him outright. You left him, not knowing whether he were dead or alive, not caring how terribly he were injured; you left him to die alone on the rocks of the cañon—this man who had served us,—while you ran away! I am ashamed of you,—ashamed that you belong to me, however remotely. You are not fit to be here in his presence. Leave the room!”

“*Santa Maria, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros—*” The supplication came strangely into the momentary pause that followed the words with which the air still seemed vibrating. Although he was not aware of hearing or heeding it, perhaps this supplication suggested to Arturo his next action; for he suddenly fell on his knees by the side of the bed, and stretching out his hand, laid it on Lloyd’s.

"See, Victoria!" he cried. "I lay my hand on his and I call the Holy Mother of God as my witness, while I swear that I never meant to injure him, and that I never doubted he was dead when I left him."

The intense passion which filled his voice was of a kind that could not be feigned. It carried conviction to Victoria, and it did more: it touched some chord in Lloyd's mind, which was slowly struggling back to consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked at Arturo. "Don't be frightened!" he murmured, recognizing instinctively the agony on the pale face. "It was an ugly fall, but—you see—I am not dead!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS RIVERS OBTAINS A PROMISE.

NOTHING more was heard of Armistead by the Caridad people for several days after his interview with Mr. Rivers. It was known that he had left Tópia, but for what purpose or what destination was not known; although it soon transpired that he had found some one to fill the place which had been vacated by Lloyd and declined by Thornton.

“Dissipated fellow, named Randolph,” the latter said in answer to a question of his chief. “Formerly with the Silver Queen in Arizona, then drifted down to Sonora; been with one or two mines there, but didn’t stay long. I met him in the plaza one evening and he asked me if there was a chance for him with the Caridad. I couldn’t give him much encouragement—”

“I should think not,” said Mr. Rivers, dryly. “I never take a man of that kind into my employ.”

“I felt rather sorry for the poor devil, though,” Thornton went on. “I’m glad Armistead has given him a chance. It’s a pretty good proof, however, of Armistead’s desperation,” he added with a laugh; “for benevolence isn’t his strong point. I should be

sorry to go to him for a helping hand if I were down on my luck."

"This man may serve his purpose," said Mr. Rivers; "although he has the disadvantage of being a stranger and not knowing the people here."

"Great disadvantage, too, in a place like Tópia, with a floating population of miners, some of whom are a pretty bad lot," said Thornton.

"Armistead is very bitter about Lloyd," remarked Mackenzie, who was sitting by,—for this conversation took place in the patio one evening, when the men with their cigars were grouped around Miss Rivers in her special corner under the Moorish lantern. "Says he did him a great favor by bringing him back here, and now he—that's Lloyd—has deserted him—that's Armistead—because he's afraid to have anything to do with the Santa Cruz business."

"He should reserve that story strictly for people who don't know Lloyd," said Thornton. "I told him so the other day when he offered me the place Randolph now fills."

The speaker was modestly conscious of the interest with which three pairs of eyes were turned upon him.

"So he offered the position to you!" said Mr. Rivers. "I might have guessed he would. I'm a little surprised you didn't accept it. To serve Trafford's interest would be to open many lucrative chances for yourself."

"Oh, yes! I know that," Thornton answered; "but—" (he looked at a fair face smiling approvingly on him) "I suppose scruples are catching. At least I couldn't make up my mind to serve Trafford's interest in this particular case."

"Scruples are very much in the way of a man who wants to get on in life," Mr. Rivers remarked; "but I am glad you haven't discarded yours, and also that the Caridad isn't to lose your services."

"Thank you, sir!" Thornton replied, flushing a little; for the Gerente was usually more caustic than complimentary to his subordinates.

Miss Rivers was yet more complimentary when he found himself alone with her a little later.

"You do yourself injustice," she said, "by talking of scruples being catching. I grant that Mr. Lloyd's example was inspiring, but I am sure that even without it you would have refused to help in this shameful business of the Santa Cruz."

Thornton smiled as he looked at her.

"I don't remember saying anything about Lloyd," he answered. "I certainly was not thinking of him at all. The scruples I mentioned were suggested by —another person."

"Oh!" she laughed. "The other person is delighted to have exercised an influence. But, again, I think you do yourself injustice. I'm sure you would not have needed any suggestion at all in such a plain case."

"It's very good of you to be sure, but I am not," said Thornton, candidly. "I'm afraid I should have looked upon it simply as a matter of business if I had not had the benefit of your views."

"I am glad they were so illuminating; but you must perceive they did not have the same effect upon Mr. Armistead, which proves that your disposition is very different from his, and so you could not have done what he is doing."

"My disposition is certainly different from his," Thornton agreed; "though whether or not the rest follows—but I must not quarrel with you for thinking better of me than I deserve. Only," he added, his voice changing a little, "it is quite certain that whatever I am in this matter you have made me—I mean that you have given me a standard by which to try things, and—and I've merely followed it, that's all."

Isabel Rivers leaned forward and laid her hand for an instant, in a touch light as a snowflake, on his own.

"Thank you!" she said sweetly and frankly. "That is a very kind thing to say, even if you are giving me too much credit; for I am confident you would have acted in the same manner if I had not been here. Now tell me something of this man Mr. Armistead has picked up. First of all, do you think he can do for him what Mr. Lloyd or yourself could have done?"

"On general lines, no doubt, pretty much the same; though in some respects he'll be handicapped by the fact that he is a stranger."

"And so doesn't know anything about the different characters of the men here?"

"Naturally not."

"Therefore will not know whom to select for—a surprise party, let us say?"

Thornton stared.

"So you know about it, too," he said.

"Since it seems that it is no secret, I may admit as much."

"Oh, it's a secret fast enough! But, you see, Armistead was obliged to mention it when I asked what he wanted me to do."

"Yes, I see."

Miss Rivers leaned her soft chin on her hand and looked out over the sleeping valley to the great eastern heights, their cliffs cutting sharply against the purple sky, with one deep indentation marking the pass over which she had watched a horseman disappear several days before.

"How long does it take to go from here to the Santa Cruz Mine?" she asked abruptly.

"Two or three days,—depends, of course, on how fast one travels. I don't think Armistead has gone there," he said, as if reading her thoughts.

She smiled, for they had not been with Armistead.

"Why do you not think so?" she inquired.

"Well, he went in another direction—though that

might have been a blind,—and he had only Randolph with him. He can't surprise the Santa Cruz without having a force large enough to hold it after it is surprised."

"He may have that force waiting for him somewhere in the Sierra."

Thornton shook his head.

"He hasn't had anybody to get up the men. No: you may take my word that it will be some time yet before he carries out his plan; and if the Santa Cruz people are only wide enough awake, it will never be successfully carried out."

"Surely they *will* be wide enough awake,—surely they will suspect something of this kind!"

"I hope so, for my sympathies are all with them," said Thornton, cordially. (His interest, however, was not very keen.) "And now if I bring the guitar will you sing a little?" he asked, in the tone of one turning to more agreeable things.

A few days later Armistead returned as quietly as he had gone away, and still accompanied only by Randolph. On the evening of the day of his return he presented himself at the Caridad house with all his usual air of self-complacency, and Miss Rivers received him with the friendly cordiality she showed to everyone.

"We have been wondering what had become of you," she told him, quite truthfully. "You have been away for some time."

"Yes: I have been over to Canelas and to one or

two other places," he answered. "Charming place, Canelas,—buried in fruit-trees and flowers, with a picturesque old church that would set an artist wild. You ought to go there. It is just the kind of place you would enjoy."

"I intend to go there some day, but just now I am going into the Sierra. You are in time to bid me *bon voyage*. I leave to-morrow for Las Joyas."

Armistead looked as startled as he felt.

"It can't be possible," he said, "that you are going to that place?"

"Not only going, but charmed, enchanted, delighted to go!" she answered gaily. "Why should you think otherwise? Haven't you heard me say again and again how much I have wanted to go out into the Sierra?"

"I have never been able to believe that you were in earnest in saying so."

"Which proves how little you know me. And haven't you also heard me declare that I fell in love with Doña Victoria when we came up the quebrada together?"

"One allows much for—ah—feminine exaggeration, you know."

"I really don't know; for I am not accustomed either to exaggerate or to be allowed for. As a matter of fact, I meant exactly what I said in both cases; so you may judge whether or not I am pleased to accept an invitation to her hacienda which Doña Victoria has kindly sent me?"

Armistead looked grave.

"I am sorry," he said, "that you should think of going into the enemy's camp."

Miss Rivers lifted her brows.

"The enemy's camp!" she repeated. "I'm afraid I don't understand—whose enemy?"

"Why mine, of course! You can't have forgotten that I represent a claim which the Calderons are fighting."

"By no means; but surely you have not forgotten that I told you they have my best wishes for their success in the fighting."

"Telling me that and going off to their stronghold is a different matter. Although I regretted the first, I haven't much minded it because—er—"

"You were kindly disposed to overlook the inherent reasonableness of the feminine mind. I know: you have been good enough to tell me so before."

"Inherent unreasonableness! Oh, no, no! You have mistaken me greatly. I should rather say the delightful enthusiasm, the proneness to be influenced by—er—sympathy."

"All of which means precisely the same thing. Well, unreasonableness, enthusiasm, sympathy, or whatever you will, pray understand that I am a Calderon partisan; and if I could, I would help them fight for their rights."

Armistead succeeded in achieving a very reproachful expression.

"You would help them against me?" he asked.

"Against you or anybody else who fights for injustice and greed."

The reproachful expression changed rapidly to one of offence.

"I didn't know that you regarded the matter in quite that light," Armistead said stiffly.

"I regard it exactly in that light, as far as Mr. Trafford is concerned," said Miss Rivers. "Of course I understand that you are acting merely as his agent."

"Reluctantly, I assure you. But, as I have tried to point out to Lloyd—"

"Who has manifested an almost feminine degree of unreasonableness on the subject, I believe."

"A donkey-like obstinacy would be describing it more correctly. Well, as I have tried to point out to him, if I gave up the matter, I should simply do myself an injury and accomplish nothing for the Calderons, since some one else would at once be sent here to conduct the fight against them."

"I remember that you have explained this to me before, and I think that I fully understand your—point of view."

"And the difficulty of my position, I hope—placed as I am between two fires."

"Mr. Trafford is one fire, I suppose; and the other—"

"The other is the fear of alienating your sympathy, of doing what you disapprove."

"Oh, really, you are very kind! But you give

too much importance to my opinion," protested Isabel, hastily. "I thought you were going to say that the other fire is the fear of injuring the Calderons, who have been already so deeply injured."

Armistead shrugged his shoulders.

"I confess that I haven't given much thought to the Calderons," he said frankly. "Their feelings and their injuries are altogether outside of my business."

Fortunately for himself, he did not understand the expression with which Miss Rivers regarded him. He was not the first man who had been unable to see anything beyond the beauty of those deep, brilliant eyes. He leaned forward suddenly.

"Why should we talk of the Calderons?" he asked. "The subject is not an agreeable one, because we do not agree in our view of it, and I would never wish to disagree with you."

"That would be very stupid!" laughed Isabel—a past mistress of the art of fencing. "If we never disagreed, we should soon have nothing to talk about."

"Oh, there are topics!"

"Without doubt. The weather—but that doesn't exist as a topic in Mexico,—not to speak of Shakespeare and the musical glasses. But I think I prefer the Calderons, or rather the Santa Cruz. Have you forgotten that you told me, when you first came to Tópia, that you intended to take possession of the mine by means of a surprise?"

"I have not forgotten, though I am afraid I was indiscreet in confiding my plans to one whose sympathies are with the enemy; although, of course, this does not mean that I imagine for a moment that you would betray my confidence."

If there is such a thing as an inward blush, Miss Rivers was conscious of it at this moment. She had not betrayed his confidence in the letter, but her conscience told her that she had come perilously near to doing so in the spirit; and yet to regret it was impossible.

"I have been thinking of this plan of yours a great deal since I received Doña Victoria's invitation," she said. "You can see for yourself that it makes my position difficult. How can I accept or enjoy her hospitality, with the knowledge that any day, even while I am under her roof, the mine may be taken from her?"

"If it were so, you would have had nothing to do with it."

"Nothing of course, unless it were that I knew and had failed to tell her all I knew, and that I should be connected by nationality and acquaintance with those who had done it. So"—she smiled, and few indeed were the men who had ever been able to resist that smile—"I want you to promise that you will defer your surprise until after I have made my visit to Las Joyas."

Armistead hesitated a moment, then suddenly saw

his way to the advantage of doing a favor at not the least cost to himself.

"How long shall you be at Las Joyas?" he asked.

"Probably a week, then a week in the Sierra—going and coming."

"Two weeks!" he reflected. "It will be inconvenient—my plans are nearly completed for an earlier date,—but since you ask it, for *you* I will promise to wait two weeks before surprising the mine."

"Thank you!" she said gratefully. "You have made my visit possible; for really if you had not promised, I don't see how I could have gone. I should not have been able to enjoy anything, whereas now I shall try to forget about the Santa Cruz."

"I hope that you will forget it," he said significantly. "If I had imagined it possible that you would be going to Las Joyas, I should never have mentioned the mine or my plans to you."

"Please believe that nothing will induce me to say a word of them or of you to Doña Victoria—to any one at Las Joyas," she said earnestly. "I will not even think of the mine if I can avoid it—"

"Don't add that you will not think of me; for if you do I must reconsider my promise."

"On the contrary, I shall think of you as having obliged me very much and helped to give me a great pleasure," she said graciously. "But here comes papa! Papa, did you know Mr. Armistead had returned?"

CHAPTER XIX.

“I HAVE BEEN CAST OUT OF EDEN.”

INTO the life of Las Joyas a new element entered when Lloyd was borne senseless across its threshold. It was not only that he was the first of his race to be received there as a friend, since the one who had so basely betrayed the friendship he had found and the love he had won in this spot, but the circumstances surrounding his advent gave it a significance and influence which in their ultimate effect could hardly be exaggerated.

The first immediate effect was the conversion of Arturo Vallejo from an enemy into a friend. Those words of generous reassurance uttered by Lloyd as his mind struggled back to consciousness, not only won the gratitude of the young man, but his affection as well,—an affection which he showed in a devotion of personal service that at times annoyed Victoria. For she was not inclined to delegate to any one her right of caring for the man who had incurred his injury as a direct result of service rendered to herself; and she impressed upon Arturo so frequently and so forcibly his responsibility for this injury, that Lloyd was at last driven to beg that the matter might be allowed to be forgotten.

"It was purely an accident," he urged; "and it is not right to make Don Arturo feel so badly about it."

"It was no accident which made him deliberately waylay and quarrel with you," said Victoria.

"Perhaps not; but it was a foolish, youthful impulse, of which he has thoroughly repented."

"It is right that he should repent," she said inflexibly.

"But it is not right that you should continue to drive the occasion for repentance so remorselessly home," he answered, smiling. "No great harm has been done. I have neither a broken head nor a dislocated neck—"

"It is no thanks to him that you have not."

"Very true; but our acts must be judged by their intention, and he had no intention of causing either the one or the other. Besides, he is now my *amigo*."

"So is everyone at Las Joyas," said Victoria, gently.

Which was quite true. For Las Joyas soon discovered that it was entertaining, if not an angel unawares, at least an altogether unique gringo. Don Mariano, who had much experience with the species, declared this solemnly. With the usual type—men who possess no manners worth speaking of, who exhibit a rough contempt for all habits and standards which differ from their own, and who seek with a fierce intensity the precious metal

which they hold at a value far transcending that of their own souls—he was familiar. It is a type very well known in Mexico, and considered to be representative of the genus *Americano*. But here was a man who was quiet, gentle, courteous as any Mexican, with a singular indifference toward everything, even the gold he had come so far to find. One and all of these people—so easily won by consideration, so bitterly resentful of rudeness and contempt—opened their hearts to him, and he speedily became “Don Felipe” to them, as to the woodcutters and miners and small rancheros all through the Sierra.

The only exception—in some degree at least—was Doña Beatriz. And it was not strange that Doña Beatriz could not open her heart as the others (even her passionate, gringo-hating daughter) opened theirs to this gringo who had suddenly invaded her home in the irresistible strength of his weakness, and taken it by storm. She remembered how another had once entered there. And so subtle a thing is race that Lloyd’s accent, voice, manner, constantly reminded her of Trafford; although it would have been difficult to find two individuals less alike. His presence revived memories which even after the lapse of long years had a torturing power. It wakened the old bitterness, the old passions, and drove her to kneel for hours on the hard bricks of the chapel floor, praying for strength to overcome these terrible feelings and recollections. This being so, it was natural that she could give no more

than gratitude and tolerance to the man who had indeed laid her under the obligation of service rendered, but whose presence recalled so much which she would gladly have given all the wealth of the Santa Cruz to forget.

And there was another reason, stronger yet, for shrinking from him. She had caught now and then a look on her daughter's face which made her ask herself if the old tragedy was, in any form to be repeated. It seemed incredible that it could be so; but life had taught Doña Beatriz with very convincing force that it is often the incredible, as well as the unexpected, which happens. She said nothing to Victoria nor to any one else save God; but she carried about with her an abiding fear that the past would repeat itself; and that, through association with this alien, her daughter, in one way or another, would be called to follow in her own steps along the *Via Dolorosa* of a broken heart.

It said much for her, and for the traditions under the influence of which she had been reared, that these feelings and these fears never betrayed themselves in her manner. Toward Lloyd her gentle courtesy was unvarying; and on his side there was no one at Las Joyas for whom he felt such admiration and such deep respect as for this woman, with her noble presence and her eyes of haunting sweetness, who bore her great wrongs with a dignity and reticence which a queen could not have surpassed. He had no suspicion of her fears with regard to

himself; for nothing was further from his thoughts than that he could ever be suspected of playing the part, however modified, of Trafford; and he would have laughed to scorn the suggestion that Victoria could find anything attractive in one who (he would have said quite honestly) possessed no qualities to win a girl's fancy. They were simply good friends —Victoria and himself,—he would have said. He knew that she was grateful to him; and he was not only interested in her from the pathos of her position, but he found a singular charm in her character and companionship. It was the charm which Isabel Rivers had discerned when she quoted Wordsworth's lines about her:

And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute, insensate things.

It was this "breathing balm," this "silence and calm," which Lloyd liked. Under these traits—far inherited characteristics of a race living for untold centuries close to Nature, amid the everlasting hills—he knew that there existed a depth of passion which could leap into fire, and a fund of energy which made her the dominating power on the hacienda and at the mine. But this energy, however resistless, was never feverish or restless. Generally speaking, people of much energy have no repose. They not only wear themselves out by the unceasing fret and turmoil in which they live, but

they "get upon the nerves" of others to a degree which is very trying. Victoria never got upon any one's nerves. When not in immediate action, she was an embodiment of repose, to which her noble beauty lent itself as a vessel to the use for which it is perfectly fitted. Every movement, every gesture, expressed this repose; and when she spoke—she never chattered—the lovely Spanish words dropped from her lips like slow music.

One day she came out to Lloyd on the corridor which ran along the front of the house. Here had been placed for his benefit one of the couches peculiar to the Sierra—a wooden frame about two feet high, on which was tightly stretched the hide of a bull. Such a couch makes a Spartan bed; but sweet is the sleep which comes to the wanderer who rests on it, especially if he lies under the stars of heaven, in the forest-scented air. Stretched out now on the drum-like surface Lloyd was lying, his arms forming a pillow for his head, and his eyes fastened on the distant hills, in a state of dreamy ease of mind and body, when Victoria's shadow fell over him and he looked up at her with a smile.

"Well, Lady of Silence!" he said, for neither her footfall nor her garments had made the least noise. "Have you come to share my *dolce far niente*?"

She smiled. The Italian term was new to her, but the beautiful sister tongues of Latin birth are so much alike that she had no difficulty in understanding it.

"Yes, if you wish," she answered, and sat down on a chair near by. Then, after a moment, added: "Do you find it sweet—this doing nothing?"

"Very," he replied concisely.

"It is not usual with grin—with Americans to like to be idle, is it?" she asked. "I have heard that they are always in what you call 'a hurry.' "

He laughed at the familiar words on her lips.

"There are Americans and Americans," he answered. "I come from the South, where life still flows in easy, reposed fashion; and where the people have not yet learned—although I grieve to say the lesson is being taught very fast—that existence is given us merely to be spent in a mad, breathless, demoralizing chase after money."

"You are not chasing it, then?" she asked again, with interest.

"Not very breathlessly, as you perceive. 'Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live,' and I could never believe that it is well to spend that short time in laboriously gathering together a little wealth which must all be left behind when we go hence. There are, it seems to me, better and higher things to do with life's short golden hours."

"And that is why you like the Sierra?"

"It is one reason. In the Sierra there is no sordid struggle of man with man for low and perishable ends; but there is the great majesty of Nature, which has power to uplift the mind and the soul to noble and eternal things." Then to himself he murmured:

“What now to me the jars of life,
Its petty cares, its harder throes?
The hills are free from toil and strife,
And clasp me in their deep repose.

“They soothe the pain within my breast
No power but theirs can ever reach;
They emblem that eternal rest
We can not compass in our speech.”

Victoria regarded him curiously.

“What are you saying?” she inquired. “I do not understand English.”

“I was merely quoting some fragments of verse which have lain in my memory a long time,” he explained. “They express better than I can the charm which the Sierra holds for me. When I am among the great hills and the deep woods, I feel that there is a healing process going on within me, as if balm were being poured into all my wounds.”

“Have you many?” asked Victoria, with the directness to which he had by this time grown accustomed.

“Who has not?” he asked in turn, evasively. And then, more from desire to change the subject than from curiosity, he added, glancing at her hand: “But what have you brought with you? It looks like a letter.”

“It is a letter—from the señorita of the Caridad. What is it you call her—Mees Reavers?”

“You would call her Doña Isabel,” said Lloyd, lifting himself up to take the letter which she ex-

tended to him. It was indeed from Miss Rivers, stating that she would leave Tópia for Las Joyas on the next—no, on the present day. Lloyd stared for a minute or two at the graceful writing on the pale gray paper, as if he found it hard to decipher. Then he looked up.

“You lost no time in following my suggestion about asking her to visit you?” he remarked.

“Why should I have lost time?” Victoria returned. “I could not do anything to please you too soon.”

“You are very good—much too good,” he answered; “but—er—there was really no question of pleasing me in this matter. I am glad that Miss Rivers is coming: I know you will like her; but it chances that I must leave Las Joyas to-morrow.”

“Leave—to-morrow!” Victoria was aghast. “It is impossible. You are not able to go.”

“Oh, yes, I am thoroughly able! Nothing but your kindness and my own indolence has kept me here for a week past.”

“I am sure that your head is not ‘all right’ yet,” she said, using the English expression which she had caught from him.

He gave the head in question a shake, as if to test its condition.

“It feels as right as I have any reason to hope that it ever will,” he assured her.

“Not as well as it did before your accident?”

“Yes, quite as well, I think.”

There was a pause, during which Victoria regarded him with the intentness which characterized her. He was conscious of the steady observation of the dark eyes, but he did not meet them. Sitting on the side of the couch, he drew a pipe from his pocket and began to charge it with "short-cut," which required to be pressed down in the bowl with great care and attention.

"I do not understand why you should go away as soon as you hear that the señorita is coming," Victoria said at length. "I thought you liked her."

"So I do—very much," Lloyd replied quickly; "and I regret not to have the pleasure of seeing her. But I was due at San Andrés ten days ago, and I must really go to-morrow."

"I am sorry that I asked her to come, if her coming is to be the cause of your leaving," Victoria went on.

"But why should you think it the cause?" Lloyd asked. "On the contrary, I have business at San Andrés—"

Victoria waved the business aside with an imperious gesture.

"You had not thought of going before you read that letter," she said with positiveness. "And I do not see why the señorita should drive you away—"

"She is not driving me away," Lloyd interposed, with what he felt to be perfectly futile protest.

"Unless you dislike her—" Victoria proceeded.

"I assure you that I like and admire her extremely," he now interposed eagerly.

"Or you are in love with her," Victoria ended calmly.

"I!—in love with her!" Lloyd was vexed to feel the blood mount in a tide to the roots of his hair, so entirely was he unprepared for this. "Why should you think anything so absurd?" he demanded almost angrily.

Victoria continued to regard him for a moment longer, and then she looked away—out over the green valley to the steadfast heights. "I have seen it in your face and heard it in your voice, when you spoke of her," she answered quietly.

There was again a silence, in which it was Lloyd's turn to stare at the speaker. He knew well this power of reading the primitive emotions which children, savages, the unlearned, and some persons who share the traits of these—their simplicity of character and feeling—possess: He felt that to argue against such divination, however much it overleaped the actual truth, was useless; and, moreover, a sudden idea, a sudden fear struck him with a sharp shock. What expression it was on the face somewhat turned from him which suggested this idea, this fear, it is impossible to say; but under a compelling impulse he spoke, very gravely:

"You are mistaken, señorita. As I have said, I like and admire Miss Rivers as much as—well, as you will when you know her. But the feeling of which you have spoken is impossible on my part. It has no place in my life—I can not offer it to any woman."

She faced him now quickly.

“Why not?” she asked peremptorily.

“Because, for one thing, the power of it has been burned out of me,” he answered. “I will speak to you very frankly, because I think—I am sure—we are friends.”

Her eyes met his with a gaze full, frank, direct.

“Yes,” she said, “we are certainly friends.”

“And friends should know the truth about each other, so as to avoid mistakes like this you have made in thinking—”

“In *feeling*,” she said, as if to herself.

“That it is possible for me to fall in love with any one.” He paused a moment. It was evidently hard for him to go on. “I would rather not tell you what happened to me long ago. But it was an experience which has made me an exile from my home for years, and which has also made it impossible for me ever to make another home for myself. So I have wandered here and there—a lonely and unhappy man—until I came into the Sierra, and the Sierra gave me peace.”

“I knew that you had suffered,” said Victoria. “I have thought: ‘Perhaps he has lost that which he loves best.’ ”

“There is a sorrow deeper than losing that which one loves best,” he said, with stern bitterness. “It is learning that one never had anything worth losing; it is learning that there is nothing in the world worth striving for, and nothing that gives any satisfaction after one possesses it. That is a sickness

of the soul which not even the Sierra can heal. But I do not want to talk of myself," he added quickly and impatiently. "I only want to make you comprehend that the things called love and happiness are not for me. They lie far behind me. I have been cast out of Eden long since, and there is no flaming sword necessary to warn me from its gates: I would not enter them again if I could. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is too bitter."

Victoria leaned toward him with the almost divine pity, which women are quick to feel for wounds such as these, shining in her eyes.

"I wish that I could help you!" she said in a low tone.

Low as it was, there was a passion in it which started Lloyd.

"No one," he answered, with the sternness which had been in his voice before, "can help a man who has ruined his own life. I have done that, so waste no compassion on me. And don't think that I complain: I only want you to—understand."

"I think I understand," she said. Her glance turned again toward the great hills, the deep, encompassing woods. "I am glad that the Sierra has given you peace," she added softly. "Some day it may give you happiness as well."

"If so," he answered—and his gaze turned also, with something of longing, toward the mountains and the forest—"it will only be, I think, in the form of the deepest peace which can come to man."

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE QUEBRADA ONDA.

AMONG the many quebradas which abound in the Sierra, the greatest and deepest, as its name implies, is the Quebrada Onda. This vast chasm cuts clear across the range, and is of such extent that no trail following the course of the Sierra can avoid it; so that those who journey there must of necessity consume at least half a day in going down into its depths and climbing out of them again. It is all up-and-down work; for the quebrada, though several thousand feet deep, is so narrow at the bottom that it would be possible to fling a stone across it. Hence the traveller who has followed the trail as it zigzags for miles down the steep mountain slopes to the depths of the abyss, must immediately face a similar acclivity on the opposite side, and has an opportunity to decide which is worse—to journey painfully and perilously downward or to strain laboriously and perilously upward.

Most travellers pause a little between the two experiences, in order to rest themselves and their animals. But it is not likely that the marvellous picturesqueness of the spot appeals to many of them. The tourist has not yet penetrated into the Sierra;

and to those who journey among these mighty heights, the tremendous cañon is only a very unpleasant feature of the way. "*Ah, que mala!*" the *arrieros* say, shaking their heads, when the Quebrada Onda is mentioned; and this is the sum of popular opinion concerning it.

Occasionally, however, chance brings a pair of eyes into these scenes which are capable of perceiving their picturesque grandeur, their wild, entrancing loveliness. Such eyes belonged to one of two travellers who on a certain day rode down into the Quebrada Onda. The first of these was a Mexican—a *mozo* of the type found in rich men's households,—a man of muscular frame and honest, trustworthy face, wearing tight-fitting breeches of leather, girded about the waist with a red sash; short jacket, also of leather, elaborately braided; wide, heavily-trimmed sombrero, high boots and great spurs. The second was a young woman dressed in a habit of water-proof serge, and heavily veiled to guard against the sun-burn which even men dread in these regions; but not so heavily as to hide the outlines of charming features, nor to obscure the luminous glances of eyes which lost no detail of the beauty through which their owner was passing. These eyes were shining with delight when, as the two riders reached the bottom of the quebrada, the *mozo* who had led the way down the steep trail drew aside, and the girl—Miss Rivers, in brief—rode forward toward

the crystal-clear stream which flows through the gorge. For Nature has lavished on this spot, hidden deep in the everlasting hills, everything which is hers to give. Here are great masses of rock—like titanic bastions and towers, luxuriant verdure, groups of stately, tapering pines, flashing water, stupendous overshadowing heights, and far, far above a sky of lucent sapphire.

“O Manuel,” she exclaimed in Spanish, “how beautiful—how wonderfully beautiful! You never told me the Quebrada Onda was so lovely!”

“No, señorita,” responded Manuel, gravely. “It is bad—very bad indeed, the Quebrada Onda.”

The girl laughed, not only at his words but for very joy in the beauty around her.

“Oh, it is heavenly!” she cried. “I must have a picture of it. Quick! give me my camera and bag.”

She sprang lightly to the ground as she spoke; and the Mexican, who had already dismounted, lifted from his shoulder the straps of a camera case and a small bag and brought them to her.

In an instant she had the camera out, and, going a little farther up the stream, where the channel was strewn with rocks, sprang from one to another until she gained a mid-point in the current. “Perfect!” she said to herself, as her eye took in the view of the water, the rocks, the foliage, and the majestic heights, with their jutting cliffs, which closed the vista. But while she gazed into the “finder,” endeavoring to bring as much of this

picture as possible into her photograph, a figure suddenly passed into her field of vision and paused there. A horseman had ridden into the stream where the trail crossed it, and sat motionless, while his horse drank,—his face turned with what she felt was astonishment toward herself.

It was not necessary for her to look up to recognize this horseman. She knew him even in the “finder,” and was conscious of a distinct throb of pleasure, while the eyes behind the silvery veil shone a trifle more brightly. But she did not speak. She only smiled as she gave the touch which moved her shutter, and then quietly proceeded to wind up the camera for another view.

Meanwhile Lloyd knew almost as soon as herself what fortune—good or bad—it was which had befallen him. His heart did more than throb: it gave a great bound as he recognized the graceful figure, veiled though the face might be. For a moment he remained quite still. Then, touching his horse with the spur, he rode up the stream towards her.

“So you have come into the Sierra, after all!” he said, as, drawing up beside the rock where she stood, he leaned from the saddle to take her hand.

And Isabel, looking up at him, replied:

“Did I not tell you that I would come? You were very discouraging about the prospect of our meeting. Yet, you see we have met—‘after all,’ as you say.”

“Yes, we have met,” he observed, in apparently unnecessary confirmation of her statement. “It is *kismet*.”

If it occurred to her that he had not said he was glad to meet her, she showed no sign of any consciousness of the omission. Her manner had never been more brightly frank than when she replied:

“And this is better than the mountain top on which I foretold that I should meet you. The Quebrada is the culmination of all the enchanting picturesqueness through which I have been traveling, and therefore it is the most appropriate place in which I could thank you for the invitation to Las Joyas which has brought me into the Sierra. I am sure that I owe it to you.”

“Only in a very limited sense. But are you wandering in the Sierra all alone, like a lady in a romance?”

“Oh, no! Papa is behind, with *mozos* and mules galore. But I ride in advance, in order to have time to stop and take pictures when I like. Manuel—you know our major domo—is in charge of me, and very sensible of his responsibility.”

“He had better exercise it, then, by hurrying you on at present; for there is a heavy cloud coming up. You can not see it from here, but it may overtake you before you reach the top of the mountain, if you do not make haste.”

“A cloud!” She looked up incredulously at the strip of brilliant sky overhead. “I know it is near the

season of the rains—everyone told us we should have come into the Sierra earlier,—but there are always clouds for many days before it begins to rain, are there not? And even if it should rain, how would we be any better off at the top of the mountain than here?"

"Not better off than here, perhaps; but better off than climbing a steep and dangerous trail, hanging between heaven and earth."

"Then, cloud or no cloud, I shall wait here for papa. And meanwhile it strikes me that, unless you are in haste to go on, fate seems to have clearly intended that you shall make a sketch for me of this wonderful place."

"I should be very happy to do so, but I have no materials for drawing."

She motioned toward the bank where her bag lay.

"I have everything there; for I, too, make attempts at sketching sometimes. So if I am really not detaining you—"

It would have been easy to say that he could not delay, to express regret at his inability to gratify her, to utter a few platitudes of farewell, to shake hands, to ride away; but he did none of these things. A great hunger leaped up within him to enjoy for a little while the delight of her society, to taste for a little while the things he had renounced. What did a few hours more or less matter? It would be no more than that—a few hours or minutes

of pleasure such as might never again come into his life. And if this pleasure was to be paid for afterward with pain—well, had he not learned that pain is the price which, sooner or later, must be paid for all things?

“You are not delaying me,” he said. “Wherever night finds me in the Sierra I lie down and sleep. But even if you were, there are delays which are pleasures. Can I assist you to the shore?”

She shook her head.

“There is no need. I shall be there as soon as you, and then we’ll decide on the best point of view. I want those grand cliffs, which I couldn’t bring into my photograph.”

And so it came to pass that, far down in the depths of the wildest cañon of the Sierra, Lloyd, putting all thought of past or future away from him, knew some entirely happy moments. For if he had found Isabel Rivers charming when he met her in Tópia, where the atmosphere around them was in a certain sense conventional, what term could fitly describe what he found her now, when the spell of the Sierra, its wild freedom and surpassing beauty, seemed to have entered into and to possess her “like a passion”? While they sat together and he sketched the scene before them, she talked to him of the other scenes through which she had been passing, and every word was full of keenest pleasure and deepest appreciation.

“I have been in many picturesque countries,” she

said, "but I have never felt in the same degree the exaltation of which one is conscious here. One does not feel as if breathing common air. It is an elixir of the gods. And the untrodden freshness, the majesty of these great heights—" Then, abruptly: "You have read 'Prince Otto,' of course?"

"Long ago—at least as long as is possible."

"Do you remember—but if you are a lover of Stevenson you must—the flight of the princess? Some of the words have been singing in my memory during the last two days. Do you remember this, 'Upon all these things, as she sped along in the bright air, she looked with a rapture of surprise and a joyful fainting of the heart; they seemed so novel, they touched so strangely home, they were so hued and scented, they were so beset and canopied by the dome of the blue air of heaven'?"

"I remember them," he said; and to himself he added that they would ever after be associated with a voice which was like a haunting strain of music, and the shining of a pair of eyes full of golden light.

"I am not very much like the princess," Isabel went on, with a laugh; "but the description has seemed to suit my case. I, too, as I have 'sped along in the bright air,' have 'looked with a rapture of surprise' on scenes so beautiful that they have seemed to touch and thrill in the deepest, strangest, yet most familiar manner. Is there a strain of the dryad in some of us,—or the gypsy, perhaps?"

"The dryad in you, I am sure—Ah, there it comes!"

What came was a blaze of white light around them, and simultaneously a crash of thunder over their heads which seemed to shake the encompassing heights. Lloyd sprung to his feet almost as hastily as he had sprung when they sat together at the San Benito and he heard the sound of the loosened boulder on the mountain side above them.

"Come!" he said. "There isn't a moment to lose, if you don't want to be drenched to the skin."

"But—where can we go?" she asked bewildered, snatching up her camera, while he stuffed the drawing materials into the bag and threw it over his shoulder.

"You'll see," Lloyd answered. "Only come quickly, for the rain will be here in a half a minute."

She asked no more questions, but ran with him toward Manuel and the animals. The former stood a picture of consternation.

"Ah, Don Felipe!" he gasped, as Lloyd came up. "*Las aguas* have arrived! I told Don Roberto—"

"The mule of the señorita—quick!" Lloyd interrupted.

He seized the bridle of the animal, held out his hand, and the next instant she was in the saddle. He flung himself into his own, and, bidding her follow him, dashed across the stream. On the other side he turned down the quebrada toward a mass of towering cliffs which projected from the over-

shadowing mountain. Another blinding flash of lightning, another terrific crash of thunder, and the rain came down in a pouring sheet just as he led the way, at breakneck pace, up a steep incline to the shelter of a great overhanging rock, which formed the roof of a deep cave. Here he sprang quickly to the ground as Miss Rivers rode up.

“Any port in a storm!” he said. “Here we can at least keep dry.”

“Why, this is an admirable port!” she gasped breathlessly. “Who could have imagined such a perfect place of shelter within reach!”

“There are many of these caves along the trail—regular camping places of the *arrieros*. But I think not many know of this in the Quebrada Onda.”

“It is lucky for us that you knew of it. Manuel, what should we have done if we had not met the señor?”

“Very badly, señorita,” Manuel, who had now ridden up, acknowledged. “For I did not know of this place, although I know many like it farther along the way. The blessed saints must have sent the señor to assist us.”

“I did not think of that,” said Isabel, looking at Lloyd; “but it is quite evident that fate—or the blessed saints—had a kinder purpose even than I imagined in sending you into the Quebrada Onda. You have certainly played the part of a guardian angel, although it has been somewhat unwillingly. For if you knew of this place of shelter, why did

you want to send us on in the face of a coming storm?"

Lloyd felt himself flush.

"When I advised your hastening on," he said, "I didn't think of this shelter. I thought only of your getting over the dangerous part of the trail before the storm came up."

"Would we have been over it now, if I had gone on when you advised?"

"No: you would not have been half-way up the mountain. Your position would have been frightfully exposed and very perilous. So I am exceedingly glad you didn't follow my advice."

"And your own position—where would you have been?"

"At a corresponding elevation on the opposite side of the quebrada."

"Then, by remaining here, I saved you as well as myself from a thorough drenching—to speak of nothing worse?"

"There is no doubt of it, and I beg that you will accept my best thanks for the service."

"I am glad that I have slightly repaid my obligations to you. I have saved you from getting wet, if I have not snatched you from under a falling boulder or made artistic sketches for you. This is a pleasure which enables me to forgive you for so plainly desiring to get rid of me."

"My dear Miss Rivers—"

“Ah, don’t deny it! You *did* want to get rid of me. And it was very ungrateful, for I was so glad to see you—oh! not for a selfish reason (I caught your glance at the bag), but because I wanted to thank you for all the pleasure I owe to you, since but for you I should probably never have come into the Sierra; and to talk to you about it as I can not talk to any one else. For we feel alike on that subject at least.”

“And on many beside, I hope,” said Lloyd. “But you can not really think me so churlish as not to appreciate—by Jove, what a blaze and what a crash! No wonder Manuel crosses himself. You had better draw farther back into the cave, Miss Rivers; for the storm is increasing in violence, and the very windows of heaven seem opened.”

CHAPTER XXI.

IN A CAVE OF THE SIERRA.

K ISMET!—“It is Fate!” Lloyd had said when he found whom he had been journeying to meet in the Quebrada Onda; and he repeated the words to himself while he sat beside Miss Rivers in their place of refuge during the hour or so that the rain lasted. It was a torrential downpour, accompanied by lightning which filled the air with the blinding glare of its white fire, and thunder which echoed in crashing peals from crag to crag. Lloyd arranged a seat for Isabel in the back of the cave, where the rock shelved down nearly touching their heads; and he was relieved to note her fearlessness in the face of a storm which tried even the iron nerves of Manuel, and made the animals now and again start and quiver from head to foot, as some particularly vivid flash of electricity seemed to envelop them, some terrific shock of thunder to shake the solid foundations of the granite hills. At such moments he found himself glancing apprehensively at his companion; and he had a new realization of what a great thing is courage when he met her eyes, bright with excitement and something like pleasure.

“Isn’t it magnificent?” she cried to him once or twice; and he shouted back:

“Wonderful!”

But Lloyd had occasion to repeat “*Kismet*” again, when, after the storm had passed—the cloud rolling away, with its thunder still echoing sullenly among the heights, and a great flood of sunshine breaking forth and making the world brilliant,—he went out like the dove from the Ark, to learn how matters were; and, like that adventurous wanderer, found that the waters covered the face of the earth,—at least all that part of the earth which at present concerned him. The river, which even in its normal state flowed very near the foot of the height in which the cave was situated, had now risen until it swept the base of the cliff, completely covering the path by which they had gained their eyrie; so that to leave it was impossible without incurring certain discomfort and possible danger.

It was with a very grave face that he returned, shook his head in answer to Manuel’s eager inquiries, and went up to Miss Rivers, who was now standing on the verge of the great rock, gazing rapturously out over the marvellous beauty of the rain-drenched, sun-bathed scene, and listening to the sound of the streams, which formed a wonderful diapason of harmony. For blending with the deep voice of the river below, was the music of unnumbered waterfalls, leaping in white cascades over rocks and down defiles where be-

fore the rain had been no drop of water; their flashing, tumbling beauty glimpsed through the wealth of verdure which was already fresher, greener, more delightful to the eye for the gracious gift of the rain; and their hurrying waters singing as they poured into the gorge "to join the brimming river." Isabel held up her hand with a silencing gesture as Lloyd came to her side.

"Listen!" she said. "Is it not like a grand *Te Deum*? As if Nature were calling aloud, praising and thanking God!"

He was silent for a moment, listening as she commanded. Then he said:

"Yes; the Sierra is speaking. I have often gone far out into the mountains after a storm to listen to its voice. There is nothing like it, when the great hills, unlocking their fountains, send up a cry to Heaven—though whether it is a *Te Deum* or not I can't say."

"Isn't it worshipful enough to be one?"

"What is worshipful, like the prosperity of a jest, rests in the ear of the listener. To me it only expresses the spell of the Sierra, its austere loneliness, its wild and perfect solitude."

She looked at him now with a smile.

"It is the loneliness which appeals to you most, is it not?" she said. "I begin to understand why you do not care to meet your friends in the Sierra."

"And yet," he parried reproachfully, "you said

only a little while ago that you, too, felt the charm of the loneliness of these enchanting solitudes."

"I do," she eagerly affirmed. "Indeed I can understand how the charm might become so great that one would break away from all the attractions and restraints of civilization to bury oneself in the wild, green recesses of the hills, and to say with all one's heart:

Now thanks to heaven, that of its grace
Hath led me to this lonely place!"

It was his turn to smile. "I hope you will remain thankful to Heaven for leading you to this particular lonely place when you hear that all these melodious waters have made you a prisoner," he observed.

"A prisoner! Impossible! How could they—in so short a time?"

"You don't know the resources of the Sierra. Besides, that rain was a veritable cloud-burst, concentrated in this quebrada. Look down—but give me your hand before you do so,—and you will see how the river has risen over our path."

She gave him her hand, and, leaning out over the edge of the beetling cliff, glanced down at the river, which, churned to white foam over its rocks, swept in turbulent, rushing flood below. When she drew back she looked a trifle startled.

"It has certainly risen very high and has a very wild aspect," she said; "but it can't possibly be

deep. We must simply ride through it. A little wetting will not matter."

"You would get more than a little wetting if you attempted to ride through that water—even if your mule could keep his footing, which is doubtful," Lloyd answered. "There is a terribly strong current. I tried it."

"You tried it!" Miss Rivers' glance swept over him and rested on some soaked garments. "Plainly you don't mind a wetting."

"Oh," he said carelessly, "I turned back when the water rose over my boots! I saw that it would not do for you to venture. There is really nothing for it but to stay here until the stream goes down."

"And how long will that be?"

"Not more than a few hours."

"A few hours! What will papa think has become of me? And what will *he* do."

"If he comes down into the quebrada, he will have to remain on the other side of the river until it falls."

"In absolute uncertainty about my fate—whether I have been swept away by the flood or struck by lightning!"

"I don't think Mr. Rivers has a sensational imagination. I have no doubt he will be anxious about you, but he will not be likely to anticipate anything worse than that you have been thoroughly drenched."

"As I certainly should have been but for you. I

suppose there is no doubt, alas! that *he* has been drenched?"

"Not much, I fear. But he is an old Sierra traveller, who knows how to take care of himself and to accept the inevitable with philosophy."

"Which we must practise also. Manuel, do you know that the river has made us prisoners here?"

"Yes, señorita," Manuel replied; "but that is better than that we should have been without shelter in the storm. We can wait until the waters go down."

"What do you think Don Roberto is saying?"

Manuel shrugged his shoulders. Plainly he did not care to commit himself to any conjecture on this point.

"He will be glad when he knows that the señorita has been so safe," he replied.

The señorita laughed as she sat down on a stone.

"Really," she said, "this is quite unexpectedly adventurous! I think I should positively enjoy it if you were a shade more hospitable, Mr. Lloyd."

"What can I do?" Lloyd asked. "My castle is yours, but the possibilities of hospitality are somewhat limited—unless I can offer a little tequila—?"

Miss Rivers declined the tequila by a gesture.

"You might sit down and try to look as if you, too, were enjoying the adventure," she suggested.

He sat down promptly.

"There is no trying required," he declared. "I have only been repressing my enjoyment because

I felt that I ought to sympathize with your anxiety to get away."

"But you see I am not suffering from anxiety. On the contrary, I am resigned to being a troglodyte as long as necessity requires. And now what shall we talk about? Oh, of course the Santa Cruz! You have not told me anything about it."

"There is nothing to tell. The enemy's forces may be mobilized, but they have not yet made a hostile demonstration. In other words, there has been no attempt to 'jump' the mine."

"I am glad to be able to assure you that no attempt will be made for some time. Mr. Armistead has promised that nothing of the kind shall take place while I am at Las Joyas."

"Did he give you an explicit promise to that effect?" Lloyd asked with some surprise.

"Quite explicit. Why do you smile? You don't—you can't think he would break it?"

"I merely smiled at the proof of your power over him. I could not have believed that Armistead would yield a point of business even for you."

"He has not yielded it,—you quite overrate my influence. He has only agreed to delay a step which, frankly, I don't think he is altogether ready to take. You see your defection has embarrassed him greatly."

"No doubt," said Lloyd, a little dryly. "By the by, whom has he now to assist him? When I left

Tópia he expected to obtain assistance from Mr. Rivers."

"Papa could not think of helping him, and Mr. Thornton refused; so he has picked up some one—an American named Randolph, I believe."

"Randolph!" Lloyd frowned, as if the name had unpleasant associations. "Who is he,—where does he come from?"

"Arizona, I think—or perhaps he was only connected with a mine there. But is it possible that you have heard nothing at all of these important matters since you left Tópia?"

"Perfectly possible. One hears very little in the Sierra, thank God!"

"You have been living in a cave, perhaps?"

"Very far from it. I have been at Las Joyas, laid up with a broken head."

"Mr. Lloyd!"

"Or if not broken exactly," he corrected himself, "sufficiently near it to be damaging and uncomfortable. Briefly, there was an accident. I fell down the mountain of the Santa Cruz, was picked up insensible and taken to Las Joyas—"

"A moment, please!" interrupted Miss Rivers, regarding him closely and a little suspiciously. "You have not said how the accident occurred. I am sure you are far too good a mountaineer to have *fallen* down a mountain."

"You are very kind; but, owing to the attraction of gravity, even the best of mountaineers must fall if he is thrown over the edge of a precipice."

“And you were thrown—”

“By my horse. Now, lest you should say that so good a horseman should not have been thrown, I had better admit that Don Arturo Vallejo had hold of the bridle of the horse, and there was something in the nature of—er—a struggle going on.”

“Where?”

“On a shelf-like path leading out from the Santa Cruz Mine, admirably adapted for accidents of the kind.”

“Did this occur when you went to the mine to give the warning?”

“Exactly!”

He was surprised by the look that came into her eyes.

“And I sent you!” she said in a low voice. “And you might have been killed!”

“But I wasn’t killed,” he hastened to assure her, somewhat unnecessarily. “I wasn’t even badly hurt; and Don Arturo is now my very good friend; so there is no harm done.”

“I don’t know”—she was quite pale as she continued to gaze at him. “I feel as if this matter had almost touched tragedy, and as if it may touch it again.”

He did not care to tell her how very nearly it had come to touching tragedy. Instead he said lightly:

“Let us hope not. As for my accident, I should not have mentioned it, if it were not certain that you would hear of it at Las Joyas.”

"Yes, of course I should hear of it," she said. "And Doña Victoria—what part has she played in it all?"

"Doña Victoria has left nothing undone to show her gratitude for the warning conveyed to her."

"Ah!" Miss Rivers looked away for a moment, over the wild beauty of the gorge, where white mists were rising like fairy phantoms from the defiles of the heights, before she said, meditatively: "It sounds very like the first chapter of a romance."

"Only it happens to be the last," said Lloyd, a little curtly. "After this I shall leave the Santa Cruz to fight its battle unaided by me."

Miss Rivers shook her head.

"No," she said. "I am convinced to the contrary. I have an instinct that you are destined to play a further part in the fight over the Santa Cruz."

"I shall promptly prove to you that no reliance is to be placed in such instincts. I am on my way now to San Andrés, and I shall not return to this part of the Sierra."

"You are on your way!" She laughed a little mockingly. "Very much on your way, thanks to the storm and the river and—me!"

"The storm is over, the river will go down, and I shall have the—"

"Pleasure?"

"No: regret of bidding you adieu when we leave this cave, since our ways lie in exactly opposite directions."

“Mr. Lloyd,” said the young lady gravely, “have you not learned that no man is stronger than Fate?”

Lloyd looked at her with a slightly startled expression. How was it that she should utter the words that had been in his mind ever since he rode down into the river and saw her standing on the rocks?

“Yes,” he said, with a gravity more real than hers: “I have learned it.”

“Then why do you say such futile things? You may go to San Andrés, you may go to the other side of the Sierra or of the world; but if you are to play a part at the Santa Cruz, you will be there to play it at the destined time, just as you were in the Quebrada Onda, as if by appointment, to meet me, whom you had said in Tópia you would not meet.”

“This grows serious,” said Lloyd, rising to his feet and trying to speak lightly. “If you not only make prophecies but bring about their fulfilment, I must endeavor to remove myself from the sphere of your influence. Therefore I will go and dare the raging flood, to find out if anything is to be seen of your father.”

“Oh, you must not! Sit still, and I will prophesy pleasant things—that we will never meet again, for example—”

“You are growing so unkind that I must go. Seriously, I want to test the water, and also, if Mr. Rivers is in the quebrada, let him know that you are safe.”

Unheeding remonstrances, he mounted and rode away. The two left behind watched anxiously as the swirling water rose deeper and deeper about horse and rider, until it almost covered the former's back.

"In another minute they will be swimming," said Manuel.

But that minute carried them around the jutting point of the cliff, where the river, unable to spread out, had reached such dangerous depth, and they were lost to sight, as they gained higher ground in a wider part of the quebrada.

It seemed an age, but it was really not more than half an hour, before Lloyd came splashing back, riding up the ascent into the cave and dismounting with a graver face than he had worn before.

"Miss Rivers," he said, "I am very sorry to tell you that your father has gone on."

"Gone on!" the girl cried, aghast. "But you said he could not cross the river."

"He evidently crossed it at the beginning of the storm, before the water rose so high. Then, thinking you were ahead, he pushed on as soon as he possibly could. The tracks are very plain."

"How unfortunate!" she exclaimed, with deep concern. Then, seizing the only practical conclusion, added: "We must follow as soon as possible."

"Yes," Lloyd agreed, "we must follow as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXII.

A RIDE IN THE GREENWOOD.

TWILIGHT falls soon in the Quebrada Onda.

Long before the sun has ceased to gild the upper world, shadows gather in the great earth-rift and darkness falls there, while yet all the lovely spaces of the sky above are filled with light. Under the mighty rock which formed the roof of the cave where the little party of three had taken refuge, these shadows naturally gathered earliest; and it was the perception of advancing darkness which presently brought Miss Rivers to her feet with an air of determination.

“Mr. Lloyd,” she said, “I have made up my mind. If *you* could ride through that water, *I* can. It is only a question of getting wet, and that doesn’t matter.”

“I am afraid you will find that it matters very much,” said Lloyd, as he also rose, conscious of a sense of relief; although he felt bound to remonstrate, for the falling shades had filled him with a disquiet which was reflected in the gravity of his face. “You will be wetted to your waist,” he added, warningly.

"It doesn't matter," she repeated. "We must get away from here. Night is at hand. Could we ride up that mountain in the night?"

"It would be extremely dangerous to attempt to do so."

"Well, you see, then, how necessary it is to lose no time in starting. My father must be very anxious about me, and the only way to relieve his anxiety is to go to him. Please look that my saddle is all right—"

"I will change it to my horse, if you have no objection. He is taller than your mule."

The exchange was made, the young lady mounted, and they rode down from the eyrie which had so unexpectedly become a trap, into the current of the swirling river. To Lloyd's very great relief, the water had fallen a little. It was still high—very high,—and once or twice there seemed danger that the animals would lose their footing; but they passed safely around the cliff and then to the higher ground at the edge of the quebrada. Isabel laughed a little as they splashed through the shallower water.

"To dare is generally to succeed," she said. "Why didn't I ride out with you when you tried this before, or at least as soon as you came back?"

"It was higher then," said Lloyd; "and I really think that you are sufficiently wet as it is."

He dismounted as he spoke—for they had now reached dry ground,—and regarded her soaked feet and skirts a little ruefully. But she laughed again

as he assisted her from the saddle, which was now to be changed again to her mule.

“What does a little wetting matter?” she asked. “I am sure I shall suffer no harm from it; and as for discomfort—bah! One would not come out into the Sierra without expecting to rough it a bit. I should have been very much disappointed if I had met with no adventures.”

Lloyd laughed in turn, so delightful was her gay good-humor.

“It is plain that the Sierra intends to give you all that it has to give, adventures among the rest,” he said as he unbuckled girths and assisted Manuel to change the saddles.

Miss Rivers meanwhile looked up at the sky, which seemed so very far above their heads.

“It is not as late as I thought,” she observed. “Possibly the sun may yet be in evidence somewhere. If only we can gain the top of the mountain before dark—are you quite sure papa has gone on ahead, Mr. Lloyd?”

“I don’t think there can be a doubt of it,” Lloyd replied. “There was every sign of a party having passed across the river and up the mountain about the time the storm began; and as I suppose Mr. Rivers was not very far behind you—”

“Certainly not very far.”

“It must have been his party. So—why, hallo! what’s that?”

Isabel's gaze followed his, which had suddenly fixed itself on a point across the river, and she saw at once what had arrested his attention. It was the leaping blaze of a camp-fire, kindled on a low spur of the mountain which rose on the other side of the quebrada. The same thought came to her as to him.

"Can it be papa?" she exclaimed.

Lloyd turned to Manuel.

"Do you think that is Don Roberto?" he asked.

The Mexican gazed keenly for an instant across the quebrada, and then shook his head.

"No, señor," he answered, "that is not Don Roberto. Those are not the mules or the men of the Caridad."

Lloyd looked at Miss Rivers.

"I think he is right," he said. "Shall we go on—or would you like more certainty?"

"We can have more certainty," she answered. She held out her hand to Manuel. "Give me the glasses," she said.

Manuel started with recollection, opened a sack filled with miscellaneous articles which hung by a strap across his shoulder, and produced a leather case which he handed to Miss Rivers, who took out of it a pair of opera-glasses.

"They are not field-glasses," she said, as she handed them to Lloyd; "but they are very good of their kind, and will enable you to tell who is over there."

Indeed as soon as Lloyd had adjusted the focus to his vision he saw with perfect clearness that the group of men and animals on the hillside was not the Caridad party. But, although immediately convinced of this, he did not lower the glasses from his eyes, but continued to gaze through them for a minute or two.

"Certainly not Mr. Rivers nor any of the Caridad people," he said positively. "But I'd like to know who they are."

"Arrieros, perhaps?"

"No; for they have no packs, and they seem, from the number of animals, to be all mounted. It is a travelling party clearly, and I am a little curious to know if a suspicion I have is correct. Here, Manuel, take these glasses and tell me if you ever saw any of those men before."

Manuel took the glasses, and had hardly looked through them before he uttered an exclamation.

"But yes, señor," he said, "I know almost all of them. They are men from Canelas, and even—yes, there is Pepe Vargas from Tamezula, and Tobalito Sanchez and Cruz and Pancho Lopez. *Caramba!* but it is wonderful to see men's faces like this, at such a distance."

"Do you know the señor who is with them?"

Manuel hesitated before replying.

"He has his hat pulled over his face so that I can not be sure," he said; "but he looks to me like an Americano whom I have seen in Tópia with the Señor Armistead."

Lloyd nodded as his eyes met those of Miss Rivers.

“It is as I thought,” he said.

“What do you mean?” she asked quickly. “It can’t be that you think it is the party for the Santa Cruz?”

“It is just that I am pretty sure.”

“But Mr. Armistead promised—”

“Sometimes the undue zeal of subordinates can be made to account for broken promises, or there may really be no intention of breaking the promise. I’ll find out what is intended as soon as possible. The river is too high to cross now.”

“How will you find out?”

“By a few discreet inquiries when I return here, which will be as soon as we find Mr. Rivers.”

A smile came into Miss Rivers’ eyes and curved her lips.

“I believe you mentioned a little while ago that you were resolved to leave the Santa Cruz matter severely alone in future,” she remarked.

“The Santa Cruz matter will not leave me alone, it appears,” Lloyd answered a little grimly, as, with his hand under her foot, he lifted her lightly into the saddle.

“I wish you did not feel it necessary to go so much out of your way by accompanying me,” she said, as she gathered up her reins. “Manuel can very well take care of me.”

“You must know that it is impossible for me to

think of leaving you until I have seen you safely with your father," Lloyd replied, as he swung into his own saddle.

And something in his tone—a shade of stern resolution rather than of pleasure or of compliment—made her feel that further protest was useless. It also amused her a little; for such was not the tone usually employe by men whom fortune gave the opportunity of serving her.

So they commenced the toilsome ascent out of the deep chasm, along the difficult and perilous trail which Lloyd had descended earlier in the day. Its difficulty and peril were very much increased by the torrents of rain which had lately fallen upon the mountain side, washing away soil, dislodging rocks, in places entirely effacing the path. The animals struggled gallantly over the obstacles of the way, the slender-legged mules climbing like cats; but such vigilant attention was required on the part of the riders that not even Isabel had any attention to spare for the noble view which opened as they climbed higher—the great world of heights, cleft by dark gorges and faced by sun-smitten cliffs, that unrolled like a scroll around them, spreading until its blue distance blended into the blue infinity of the sky.

But when at last they gained the final summit and paused for their panting animals to rest, they found themselves not only "ringed with the azure world," but in a realm of radiant light. For dark

as had seemed the gathering shades in the quebrada, the sun had been, as Isabel conjectured, in evidence elsewhere, and was now just sinking with magnificent resplendency behind the far, blue western heights; while in the eastern heaven the moon floated like a great silver balloon in the pellucid depths of sapphire. Over the whole vast scene, the wide expanse of this virgin world, so full of primeval grandeur, so high uplifted into the bright sky, was breathed a charm of freshness, remoteness, repose altogether indescribable. Isabel drew in a deep breath of the marvellous air; while she opened her arms as if she longed to fly away, out over the trackless wilds, the towering heights, the hanging woods and falling waters, straight into the dazzling glories of the golden and rose-red western heaven.

“Oh, for the wings of a dove!” she sighed.

If Lloyd remembered how he had once prophesied to her that she would wish for those wings, he did not say so. He only smiled at her delight.

“Be satisfied,” he said. “You send your imagination like a bird to gather in all the beauty you do not see.”

“But there is so much that I shall never see!” she replied,—and then she laughed. “How foolish I am,” she said, “when what I have seen and do see is too much for me to take in! And now I suppose we must go on?”

“Yes, and ride fast.”

Which proved to be possible; for now the trail led them over a plateau, level and open as a royal park, though covered with superb forest, where the great pines and evergreen oaks rose in columned stateliness to immense height, their interlacing boughs forming overhead a canopy of foliage through which the faintest wandering breeze woke a murmur like the voice of the sea. And as they rode, fast as their animals could be urged to go, down these enchanting vistas, with the breeze which fanned their faces bringing to them all the wild fragrances of hundreds of leagues of mighty woods, the delight of motion added to the delights of sight and sound and scent seemed to make life for the moment a thing of simple rapture.

And then the trail carried them along mountain crests, where the wooded steeps fell sharply away toward a lower world of glorious blues and purples, which gleamed and glowed between the straight stems of the giant trees and through their crowns of verdure; or it skirted the tops of foaming torrents, which flung their waters over tremendous precipices into green abysses far below, or led them through glades of sylvan beauty deep between bold hills. But through whatever scenes it passed, there was ever about the way that sea-like murmur of unnumbered leaves, together with the music of swiftly flowing streams; while the earth breathed forth perfume like a censer, and the sweet air was like a sensible benediction from the radiant, bending sky.

And as they rode, day melted into night so softly that it was difficult to tell where one ended and the other began. But the last tint of sunset color had faded, and the moon was flinging her fairy light over their way and marking it with delicate shadows, when they finally overtook Mr. Rivers and his party in a stream-fed glen, where a halt had been made as if for camping. But none of the usual cheerful preparations for the night were in progress. Indeed, Mr. Rivers was in the saddle, with the intention, he explained, of returning to the Quebrada Onda, when his daughter rode up. The relief with which he greeted her was very great, and the expression of his thanks to Lloyd left nothing to be desired in the way of cordiality; but after this it was natural that there should be some expression of the irritation which had mingled with his anxiety.

"I have had scouts after you in all directions," he said to his daughter; "and when it became clear that you were not ahead, there seemed nothing to do but to go back to that infernal quebrada. It was so clearly impossible that we could have passed you under ordinary circumstances, that I was forced to think you must have met with some serious accident."

"I am very sorry to have caused you so much anxiety," Isabel murmured regretfully.

"I've had a pretty uncomfortable afternoon, I assure you," her father returned; "and have quite

determined to keep you under my own eye in future."

"If you had kept me under your own eye, I should have been as thoroughly drenched as you no doubt were in the storm," Isabel said; "whereas, thanks to having met Mr. Lloyd, I had the pleasure of watching it from the shelter of a delightful cave."

"Hum!" said Mr. Rivers. "It was very lucky for you that you met Lloyd, and keeping dry was highly desirable; but as for finding pleasure in that downpour, in a cave or elsewhere—I can only say that *I* was extremely far from doing so; having been not only drenched, as you observe, but harassed with apprehension about you. Well, I'll take care that you don't wander out of sight any more. Now, men" (peremptorily in Spanish), "go to work and make the camp."

A little later, when this labor was over—the tent pitched, the fire made and supper prepared,—Mr. Rivers' mood underwent a change. Irritation was forgotten in the pleasant relaxation and sense of comfort which is nowhere to be experienced in quite such degree as in a camp in the greenwood after a day of hard riding. There was only light talk, pleasant laughter and jesting as they gathered around the fire, which threw its rich radiance over the rocky escarpment of the hillside overhanging the camp, over masses of foliage and the figures of men and animals. The stream near by chanted the sweetest possible song as it hurried over its

stones; and all the fragrant, pungent odors which night and recent rain draw forth in the forest filled the air, mingling with the aroma of the delightful Mexican berry from the coffee-pot placed on some red embers at the edge of the fire.

With appetites agreeably sharpened by the keen air, and spirits filled with the charm of this delightful gypsying, they feasted well on the varied contents of Lucio's well-stocked provision chest; and then came an hour or so of smoking on the part of the men, and more pleasant talk on the part of all; while Isabel reclined on a bright-colored blanket, and the firelight played over her sunny hair and lit up the smiling loveliness of her lips and eyes, frank as those of a thoroughbred boy, charming as those of a nymph. And then it was that that other campfire down in the depths of the Quebrada Onda was remembered and mentioned. Mr. Rivers looked grave when he heard of the revelations of the opera-glasses.

"I don't like this at all," he said. "Nothing could possibly be more awkward, more undesirable in every way, than that we should be the guests of Doña Beatriz Calderon when her mine is attacked by Americans."

"I can't believe that anything of the kind is possible," remarked Isabel. "Mr. Armistead promised me that no attempt to take the mine should be made while I am at Las Joyas; and I think"—she glanced at her father appealingly—"that Mr. Armistead is a gentleman."

“Oh, yes, undoubtedly a gentleman!” Mr. Rivers replied hastily. “But—er—even gentlemen permit themselves to do strange things occasionally. If Manuel really recognized those men, and if that fellow Randolph is with them, it looks—well, it looks very much as if we had better turn around to-morrow morning and go back to Tópia; for I have no intention of being mixed up, directly or indirectly, in this affair of the Santa Cruz.”

“Papa, I can’t—I really can’t go back to Tópia!” Isabel declared. “If Mr. Armistead has been guilty of such treachery, I—want to stay and help to fight him.”

“That is exactly what can’t be permitted, my dear,” her father answered. “I am afraid I was very wrong to yield to your desire of coming out here at all just now. But you see”—he looked at Lloyd—“I wasn’t altogether sorry to show in this way my sincere respect for and sympathy with Doña Beatriz.”

“Doña Beatriz deserves all the respect and sympathy which can possibly be shown to her,” said Lloyd; “and, if you will allow me to offer advice, I think you should permit Miss Rivers to continue on her way to Las Joyas. Her visit there is expected and will be deeply appreciated.”

“But if these men behind us are going to seize the mine?”

“They will not seize it. Of that I assure you. An attempt to do so will only result in injury to

themselves. But, like Miss Rivers, I find it difficult to believe that even an attempt is to be made now. Armistead, within certain limitations, *is* a gentleman, and he would not violate his own word so flagrantly."

"What can those fellows be after, then?"

"That I am going back to see as soon as my horse has finished feeding. It is a beautiful night for riding."

"But not for going down into the Quebrada Onda,—no night is beautiful enough for that. Wait until morning."

"No; for then they will be on the road, and I want to get them in camp. That is the place to find out things."

"And if you find that they are going to the Santa Cruz?"

"Then I may be able to offer Randolph some advice which will induce him to turn back."

Mr. Rivers glanced a little curiously at the quiet face on which the firelight shone.

"Do you know the man?" he asked.

"I think I do," Lloyd answered slowly. Then, perhaps to escape further questioning, he rose to his feet. At the same moment Miss Rivers rose also.

"This is charming!" she said. "But I am sufficiently tired to find my thoughts turning to the sleep awaiting me in my tent."

"Pleasant dreams," said Lloyd, stepping over to her with a smile. He held out his hand. "Good-night and—good-bye!"

“Do you really wish me to have pleasant dreams?” she asked, looking up into his face as she laid her hand in his.

“Can you doubt it?” he asked, with some surprise.

“Then don’t go down into that quebrada tonight,” she said; “else I shall certainly dream of you as falling down some terrible abyss from that fearful trail.”

“Do you think it a habit of mine to fall over precipices?”

“No, no; but to go down—over that way we came up—at night! The mere thought of it makes me shudder. If you want me either to sleep or dream well, please promise that you will not do it.”

“Very well, then,—I promise that I will wait for daylight to make the descent. But that means that I shall leave here considerably before daylight. So—*adios!*”

She did not echo the beautiful word; but, looking at him with a smile which had in it something a little mischievous, she answered, “*Hasta luego!*” and then vanished into her tent.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“NO MAN IS STRONGER THAN FATE.”

THE moon had gone down, but there was not as yet even a flush of color in the east when Lloyd mounted his horse and rode away from the Rivers' camp. Starlight in abundance there was,—the brilliant starlight of this high region; but the forest-shaded way was, nevertheless, dark as he rode alone over the trail where a few hours before he and Isabel had ridden together so fleetly and so gaily. But he had the true woodsman's eye and instinct; so, despite the deep shadows which lurked under the great trees, he had not wandered from his way when suddenly there was a stirring, sighing movement in the wide sea of verdure overhead, as a light breeze swept through it, and simultaneously a lightening through all the mysterious forest spaces, showing that day was at hand.

Nothing can be conceived more beautiful than morning in the Sierra. Toward daylight the air grows quite cold; and when the sun rises, his brilliant rays flash over a myriad diamonds of hoarfrost, gemming every blade of grass; and there is a thin rim of ice on any water which has been standing over night. The atmosphere has a sharp

edge; but its divine, ozone-laden quality gives to mind and body a sense of almost incredible buoyancy and energy. Nor does the chill last long. The sun has hardly appeared above the pine-crested heights when the lovely frost has vanished, and grass, ferns, vines, leaves—the whole green, wonderful world is simply drenched in crystalline freshness. And then what exquisite mists rise in delicate, filmy wreaths and sprays out of the deep gorges, trailing their gossamer whiteness over the great, forest-clad shoulders of the hills, or lying as a crown upon the brows of the tall peaks! There is a stir of life in all the dewy forest coverts, where the gentle creatures in fur and feathers dwell. They are all rousing—the deer from their fragrant beds of fern; those gay wood-sprites, the squirrels, from their chambers in the giant arms of great trees; the birds in their leafy perches. For day has come—another long, beautiful, golden day in the fair, wild greenwood.

All this radiance was about Lloyd as he rode down into the Quebrada Onda, reaching the river in time to see the camp on the farther side just stirring. The stream had by this time fallen, so that it was easily forded; and he experienced no difficulty in riding across, with a glance toward a rock in mid-current where yesterday—was it only yesterday or some long age ago?—a figure light and graceful as that of nymph or dryad had stood.

The men who were saddling their mules around the camp-fire on the knoll looked with some surprise at the solitary man—a señor, a gringo, and yet entirely unattended in these Sierra wilds—who rode up to them.

“*Buenos días, hombres!*” he said.

“*Buenos días, señor!*” they answered.

And then one, turning quickly around, uttered an exclamation.

“*Don Felipe!*” he cried. “*Come está Vd., señor?*”

“Ah, Luis!” said Lloyd, recognizing a man who had more than once been in his employ. “How are you, and what are you doing now?”

“Very little, señor,” the man replied. “At present I am with the señor Americano yonder”—he waved his hand toward the fire where a man sat taking his breakfast,—“who is prospecting for mines in the Sierra.”

“Prospecting, eh?” said Lloyd. He smiled. “I will go and speak to the señor Americano,” he said.

Dismounting, he walked over to the fire and paused before the American, who, with an expression of surprise, looked up at him.

“How do you do, Randolph?” he said coolly. “This is rather unexpected, meeting you here.”

“Lloyd!” Randolph exclaimed. Involuntarily he rose to his feet, but neither man offered to shake hands with the other. They stood for an instant silently, with the dying embers of the fire between them; each noting the changes wrought by time,

the ravages wrought by life in the face of the other. Then Randolph went on, a little hoarsely: "I heard that you were out in the Sierra somewhere."

"From Armistead, I suppose?" Lloyd answered, still coolly. "I have heard that you are doing his work." He sat down on a log near by. "May I ask for a cup of coffee?" he added. "I've been riding for several hours."

Randolph nodded to one of the Mexicans, who brought coffee and also some broiled meat and bread.

"You needn't hesitate on the score of bread and salt," he said, as he resumed his own seat. "These are Armistead's provisions, not mine."

"So I supposed; and, as you perceive, I am not hesitating," Lloyd returned.

But he ate absently and with little appetite, only drinking eagerly the strong black coffee, the stimulating effect of which he felt immediately. It was after he had drained his cup that he looked again at Randolph, who had meanwhile continued his own breakfast.

"Are you going to the Santa Cruz by Armistead's orders?" he asked abruptly.

"Why should you think that I am going to the Santa Cruz at all?" Randolph asked in turn.

"That question hardly calls for an answer," Lloyd rejoined. "I know Armistead's plans and intentions very thoroughly—you've probably heard that I came out from California with him, and we only parted

company when I refused the job you have undertaken,—so there's no good in trying to maintain a mystery with me. Prospecting will do with the men, but I know perfectly well where you are bound. What puzzles me is that Armistead should be making this move just now."

"Why is not now as good a time as any—granting that you are right?" Randolph asked.

"Well, for one reason, because Miss Rivers has gone to Las Joyas," Lloyd answered; "and I happen to know that Armistead gave her a promise that no attempt against the Santa Cruz should be made while she was there."

"How do you happen to know that he made such a promise?"

"That is an unimportant detail. The promise was undoubtedly given; and, unless I am much mistaken in Armistead, he would not wish to break it."

"Then he should have changed his orders. I have a letter from him in my pocket telling me to—er—carry out our plans about the prospects in the Sierra as soon as I was ready. So I am on my way to carry them out, and I have nothing whatever to do with any promise he may or may not have made to Miss Rivers."

Lloyd's glance swept comprehensively over the group of men near by before he answered. There were about a dozen,—well-picked men for the purpose in view: sinewy, vigorous sons of the Sierra; belonging to the class which drifts from mining

camp to mining camp, possessing few ties and fewer scruples, and from which what may be called the desperate class of the country is recruited. Well mounted and well armed, they formed a very effective corps for such work as Randolph had in hand; and, recognizing this, Lloyd nodded with a certain air of approval.

"You have done exceedingly well in getting up your party," he said. "You have secured exactly the right material for such an enterprise. But to take the Santa Cruz you would need to multiply them by five, if not by ten."

Randolph stared.

"You seem to know a wonderful deal about it," he said.

"I was at the Santa Cruz not many days ago," Lloyd answered; "and I am able to assure you that they are not only expecting some step of this kind on the part of Mr. Trafford's agent, but are prepared to resist it. They have five—ten—well-armed men where you have one; and anybody who knows the mine will tell that if defended, it is impregnable."

Randolph, looking a little startled, now dropped all pretence of mystery.

"Armistead has been expecting to surprise the mine," he said. "He hasn't counted on resistance."

"If you are wise, *you* will count on it," returned Lloyd, grimly. "If ever men were in earnest and determined to defend their property, those men at

the Santa Cruz are. Of course"—he rose to his feet—"you can give just what weight you please to this information. It is not intended as a friendly warning at all; for, frankly, I don't care in the least whether you and your men—precious scoundrels the most of them—are shot down like dogs or not. I have simply told you the state of affairs; and if you think you would please Armistead by making a tragical fiasco of his plan to surprise the mine, you have only to go on. Good-day!"

He strode away to his horse, which Luis was holding at a little distance; but before he was in his saddle Randolph was at his side.

"See here, Lloyd," he said, in a voice a little shaken with anxiety, "you may not have meant your information for a friendly warning; but all the same it is friendly, you know,—if things are as you have stated."

"You can believe my statement or not, as you like," Lloyd answered with curt impatience. "It hasn't been for your sake that I have warned you—"

"Oh, I know that well enough!" the other interposed.

"And you may remember sufficient about me to judge whether or not I am likely to make statements which are untrue."

"I remember," Randolph said. "There isn't any room to doubt your truthfulness. So it comes to this: if I go on, I'll be leading a forlorn hope, without the least chance of success."

"Just that," said Lloyd, tightening his girths a little.

"And I'll be hanged if I care to lead forlorn hopes for the benefit of Trafford, who is sitting at ease in San Francisco with more money already than he can count. I shall go back to Canelas and communicate with Armistead. If he chooses to increase his force and to lead it himself, I've no objection to accompanying him; but I won't take the responsibility alone."

"A sensible as well as a prudent resolution," commented Lloyd, springing into his saddle. "You may be quite sure that you could not take the Santa Cruz with five hundred men; though if Armistead has a mind to try, that is his affair. But, as you've observed, there is no apparent reason why you should risk your life in his and Trafford's interest."

"Not the least," Randolph agreed; "although it is a life pretty well without value," he added, a little bitterly.

Lloyd gave him a quick, keen glance.

"You don't look as if you had been making it very valuable of late," he observed dryly.

"I've been going to the dogs as fast as a man could go," Randolph said. "And I don't mean to put the blame of my transgressions altogether on other shoulders, but—"

"Best keep it on your own," Lloyd interrupted sternly. "After all, nothing—nobody—can drag a man down without the consent of his own will."

Randolph laid his hand on the neck of the horse and looked up into the sternly-set face above him, with its resolute mouth and jaw. There was something wistful in the gaze, which kept Lloyd from abruptly riding on. He could not disregard the mute appeal in those eyes, which contained also a confession of weakness and pain.

“That’s easy for you, perhaps,” said Randolph. “Nothing—nobody—could drag you down into the depths where I’ve been. But, unless I’m mistaken, you have been into some depths of your own; and if you’ve learned there anything that will help a man in a fight with misery and loneliness and self-disgust, and—and all the forces of hell, I’d like to know it.”

There was a moment’s pause. It was a strange appeal, considering the past relations of these men, considering all that stood between them and made friendship in the ordinary conventional sense impossible. But conventional things—codes, injuries, feeling—all seemed far away in this world where they had met; this virgin world of God, where only elemental things have a place,—the great elemental passions and hopes of man, which can raise him so high or cast him so low; and the great verities of life and death, of time and of eternity. These things abide in the Sierra; and here, as it were unconsciously, Lloyd had meditated upon them until they sank into his heart; taught him something, at least, of their divine wisdom; prepared him somewhat to

answer this strange appeal of one human soul to another,—this cry for help uttered out of the dark depths to one who was at least a brother in suffering, but who while suffering had wrested from pain its noble secret of strength.

These thoughts passed through his mind swiftly, together with a revelation—dim but convincing—of a purpose which had led him here quite different from any purpose which he had conceived. "*Kismet!*" he had said the day before when he met Isabel Rivers in the quebrada, and again when the storm had imprisoned them in the cave within the cliff; but now, as by a flash of apprehension, he seemed to see what that fate had been preparing for him. Only this—only an appeal to which he felt that he dared not close his ears; only a cry for help from a man who in a certain sense had injured him, and whose claim, therefore, upon him, according to that divine code which all men recognize to be divine because so difficult, was not to be disregarded.

"If you have decided to turn back," he said, after a pause which seemed to him long but was in reality very short, "you might as well come along with me. Our way is probably the same."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT LOS CHARCOS.

NOT far from the *casa grande* of Las Joyas there was a spot near the base of the hills which surrounded the beautiful valley, known as Los Charcos (the pools), because here the stream from the cañon of the Santa Cruz fell into a succession of rocky basins, and lay, or seemed to lie, in each, motionless as a mirror, fern-fringed, tree-arched, giving back with clear faithfulness the over-shadowing greenery and the glimpses of jewel-like sky above.

The lovely place had enchanted Miss Rivers when she was first led to it by Victoria; and nothing pleased her so much as to go there afterward—often alone,—and, while she sat or lay in the deep green shade by the side of the mirroring water, let the marvellous beauty of Nature sink into her soul and fill it as the chalice of a flower is filled with dew. Many thoughts came to her in these hours, when the flowing tide of time seemed, like that of the stream beside her, to stand still; when nothing broke the wonderful greenwood stillness, and only the shifting of the shadows showed that the round earth was swinging on its tireless way, and that

after a while another golden day would go down to death.

“Oh, it is so perfect!—so perfect!—why must it end?—why can it not last?” she exclaimed one day, more to herself than to Victoria, although the latter was seated beside her on the grassy bank. She threw herself back as she spoke, clasping her hands behind her head and looking upward at the canopy of verdure over them and the dazzling heaven beyond. “One becomes an absolute pagan,” she said with a little sigh. “One wants to pour out a libation to the spirit of the woods or do something of the sort.” Then she laughed; for she had been speaking English, and Victoria looked puzzled. “It is as well that you have not understood me,” she said in Spanish; “for I have been talking like a pagan. Now, one can not express pagan sentiments in Spanish. It is impossible.”

“Why is it impossible?” Victoria asked; for she had often difficulty in following the thoughts of her companion,—a girl like herself, and yet with so wide a gulf of difference between them that there were times when each found it very hard to comprehend the other.

“Because Spanish is in its genius such a religious language, so stately, so noble, so made to be a vehicle for the great thoughts of great saints about eternal truth,” Isabel answered. “One simply can’t be frivolous in Spanish, and of course playing at paganism is being very frivolous.”

"I don't think that you are ever frivolous," said Victoria.

"Oh, yes, I am—distressingly so sometimes!" Miss Rivers replied. "But frivolity apart, I can not tell you how glad I am to have come out into this wonderful, beautiful—incredibly beautiful—Sierra world of yours. I am so grateful to you for asking me to come."

"I did not think that you would care about it," said Victoria. "It is so wild, so lonely here. But the Señor Lloyd assured me that you would like to come."

"The Señor Lloyd knew," said Isabel, smiling, as if to herself. "He knows a great deal, the Señor Lloyd," she added. "He is a very sympathetic person: he understands more than one expresses sometimes."

"Yes," Victoria assented, "he is very sympathetic." She was silent for a moment before she went on. "I never thought that there were any gringos like him," she said.

"There are not a great many," Isabel answered. "I have never met any one quite like him. He gives you the impression of being so—detached, as it were; so free from thought of or care for himself, and yet so full of consideration for others."

"He is very unhappy," said Victoria, simply.

Miss Rivers sat up quickly and stared at her.

"Now, how did you find that out?" she asked.

The dark eyes met her own quietly and directly.

"Is it not plain?" the girl asked. "Have you not known it?"

"I have felt it—guessed it, perhaps," the other answered; "but I can not say that I have known it. He does not wear his heart on his sleeve, the Señor Lloyd—which means, you know, that he does not talk of himself and his troubles, or 'pose,' as we say in English, as one whom life has disappointed. And yet it has disappointed him, deeply, enduringly. One is sure of that. One is also sure that there is no remedy for his trouble, except a certain divine remedy which he has never found."

"You mean—?"

"I mean, of course, divine faith and the healing that it has for all human wounds, the answer for all human perplexities."

"I know," said Victoria, regretfully, "that he is a heretic."

"Not a heretic in the old sense," answered Isabel. "He is more of a pagan—a modern pagan."

"As you called yourself a minute ago?"

"Oh, no, no! I was playing at being an ancient pagan—a joyous worshiper of Nature, as we fancy those to have been to whom God was never directly revealed. Modern pagans are altogether different. They have forgotten God and His revelation, and their creed is a very joyless one of pure materialism. Some of them—like Mr. Lloyd—cling to high ideals of truth and honor and duty; but they see no mean-

ing or purpose in the sufferings of life, and it hardens and embitters them."

"I do not think that he is hardened and embittered," said Victoria, slowly. "But he is hopeless, and that is worse."

Miss Rivers looked at the speaker meditatively for a moment before she answered.

"It is a little strange," she said at last, "how you have found all this out."

"No, it is not strange," the girl answered simply. "When one cares for a person, one can tell very easily how things are with—him."

Miss Rivers gave a little gasp. Surely this was unexpected frankness! She had suspected something of the kind—had not been unwilling to probe a little,—but such an avowal was as far as possible from what she had anticipated. For a moment she did not answer. Then she said:

"And you—care for him?"

"Very much," Victoria answered with the same simplicity. "He is dear to me," she went on in the beautiful Spanish which English words so inadequately render, "not only because he has been a friend and done us a great service to prove his friendship, but because he is himself—so sympathetic, as you have said, so full of understanding for the ways and thoughts of others, so kind and gentle, so much of a true *caballero* in all things, even though he is a gringo."

“Yes, he is all of that,” said Isabel Rivers, in a low tone. To herself she was wondering at the clear vision of this Mexican girl, as well as at her frankness. “A true *caballero* in all things,”—yes, surely he was that, the man with whom she had sat in the cave of the Quebrada Onda and ridden in an ecstasy of delight through the greenwood. Yet remembering him as she had known him, so unlike other men in his manner, but with a look in his eyes which now and again had made the spoken admiration of other men seem poor, her next words rose impetuously to her lips. “Does he care—like this—for you?” she asked.

“Like this?” Victoria returned, still quietly. “Do you mean as I care for him? No; why should he?”

“Why should he not?” an astonished voice murmured.

“There are many reasons,” the girl answered. “He has done much for me, but what have I done for him?”

“He says that you rescued him from the cañon of the Santa Cruz and so saved his life.”

Victoria made a contemptuous gesture.

“That was nothing. I would have done that for any one,” she said. “And, then, what am I but a girl of the Sierra—ignorant, unattractive, disowned?”

“Victoria, you shall not speak so of yourself! You know—or if you don’t know I will tell you—that you are wonderfully attractive; that you have

the beauty and the freshness and the charm of your glorious Sierra; that you are a woman to whom any man might lose his heart."

The beautiful dark eyes looked at the speaker very softly.

"You are good to tell me these things, señorita," Victoria said half gently, half proudly. "But even if they are true, it would make no difference; for the Señor Lloyd has given his heart to you."

"Victoria!"

"Surely you know it."

"I don't know it. You are mistaken—entirely mistaken."

Victoria shook her head.

"I am not mistaken," she said, with the same quietness which had characterized her other utterances. "I spoke of it once to him; and although he denied, I saw, I felt—oh, it was very plain! And then he talked—but it was enough to break one's heart the way in which he talked. He said that such a feeling as that of which I spoke had no place in his life; that love and happiness were not for him; that he had lost all right to them and had left them far behind him. He said that something had happened to him—he did not tell me what it was—which had made him an exile from his home for years and rendered it impossible for him ever to make another; so that he had wandered for years, a lonely and unhappy man, until he came to the Sierra, and the Sierra gave him peace."

"Ah, poor soul!" said Isabel Rivers, understanding, by a flash of intuition, what manner of peace it was of which he spoke.

"But as he talked," Victoria went on, "I could see—I could tell—that he felt more than he would own for you, and that you alone could help him. So I determined to tell you when you came."

"But you—" Isabel began, wonderingly.

"I have no power to help him," the other interposed quickly. "You must not misunderstand what I have said. He is dear to me—very dear; but it is as an *amigo*,—a friend you call it. He could never—not even if he cared for me as he does not care—be anything else to me; for I could never unite my life with that of a gringo—"

"You have just said that Mr. Lloyd is not like a gringo," Isabel reminded her.

"It is true that he is not like one," Victoria replied; "but he is one. And so between him and me there is something which can not be crossed, and that something is my mother's heart. It would break her heart if I—followed in her footsteps; for that is how it would seem to her. I have found out that she has been miserable, fearing this; and I have promised—nay, I have sworn before the holy altar—that I will never marry a gringo."

"Victoria, that was wrong! You had no right to swear such a thing."

"Had I not a right to consider my mother before anything else on earth?" Victoria asked. "Think

for a moment, señorita! I am all that she has,—all. It would be hard upon her if God were to call me out of the world, would it not? But to that she could resign herself: she could pray, she would know that I was safe until we should meet again. But if she saw me marry a man of the race of the man she married, I believe that she would die of grief; for nothing could make her believe that I was not destined to suffer all that she has suffered."

"If she knew Mr. Lloyd—" Isabel began.

"She knows him," Victoria interrupted, "and she likes him. Oh, yes, she likes him and she is grateful to him! But she remembers that once she liked and trusted another, and—and she trembles and grows pale over the thought that I might trust as she did. It was not enough to tell her that the Señor Lloyd has no thought of me. So I have promised—I have sworn—that I will marry no gringo; and it is a promise, señorita, that I shall never even be tempted to break."

Silence followed the last significant words,—a silence in which Isabel heard the soft murmur of the leaves overhead and the crystalline song of the stream as it flowed away from the sleeping pools, but which seemed to give her no hint or whisper of anything which it was possible to say to this girl who was bearing the burden of mistakes and wrongs in which she had no part. At length Miss Rivers simply uttered the thought which filled her mind to the exclusion of all others.

"You are very brave and very noble, Victoria,—strong and beautiful as your own mountains," she said.

"Señorita!"—the dark eyes suddenly swimming in tears met her own. "You are very good,—I felt from the first that you were good," the girl said passionately. "And you will help the Señor Lloyd, will you not?"

Touched more deeply than it is easy to express, Isabel leaned forward and laid her hand on the slender, sunburned hand near by.

"My dear," she said gently, "I have no power to help Mr. Lloyd—"

"Oh, you have—you have!" Victoria interposed.

"But if I had power," Isabel went on hastily, "I have no opportunity. It is likely that I shall never see him again—"

She paused suddenly, the words arrested on her lips, while she gazed out from the shadowy greenness of their retreat to the plain, across which a horseman was riding. Even at this distance it was clear that he was not a Mexican.

"Who is that?" she asked, attracting her companion's attention to the figure. "Is it—Mr. Lloyd?"

Turning her head quickly, Victoria looked in the direction indicated, her eyes narrowing in the intensity of their gaze for an instant; then she rose to her feet, frowning, superb.

"It is not Mr. Lloyd," she said. "It is the other—the Americano named Armistead."

CHAPTER XXV.

A REQUEST FOR CONSOLATION.

VICTORIA'S keen glance was not at fault. It was indeed Armistead who rode up and dismounted in the green shade by the sparkling pools.

"I was told at the house that I should find you here," he said in English to Miss Rivers, after a bow which included both girls; "so I have taken the liberty of coming to seek you. I hope"—he had glanced at her face—"that I have not presumed too far—"

"Frankly, I think that you have," Isabel replied, with a coldness of manner he had never known her display before. "As a guest at Las Joyas, I have neither the right nor the desire to receive as a visitor one who is held here as an enemy. It is asking too much, even of Mexican hospitality."

"It did not occur to me that you would regard my visit in that light," he said, a little disconcerted. "I did not think of the people of the place—I only thought of seeing you."

"The people of the place, however, demand consideration from me, if not from you," Isabel answered. "I must immediately apologize to Doña Victoria for this—intrusion."

She turned to Victoria as she spoke, and said a few words in Spanish. Even Armistead was struck by the dignity and grace with which the Mexican girl replied:

“If he has come to see you, señorita, assure him he is welcome. Our house is yours, and it is for you to bring whom you will into it.”

“I have not brought this visitor, and I have not the least desire to bring him,” Isabel answered, “but since he has come, I suppose that I must hear what he has to say.”

“You will return with him to the *casa grande*, will you not?”

“No. I can not take him under your mother’s roof. I will talk to him here.”

“I am sure that my mother would prefer your taking him to the house,” Victoria urged.

Isabel looked at Armistead.

“Doña Victoria begs me to return with you to the *casa grande*,” she said; “but I have told her that I prefer to talk with you here.”

“I also much prefer it,” he replied. Then, addressing Victoria in somewhat stumbling Spanish, he expressed his apologies. “Since I was passing through the hacienda, on my way to Durango, I have ventured to call to see Miss Rivers; but I shall not delay very long.”

“As the guest of Miss Rivers, you are welcome to Las Joyas, señor,” Victoria said. “I have just asked her to invite you to the house.”

“Many thanks!” he answered. “But I will not trespass on your hospitality. I can very well pay my visit in this charming spot.”

“Then I will leave you,” Victoria said to Isabel; and, with a slight bow to Armistead, she walked away up the side of the stream.

As she left them, Miss Rivers regarded her unbidden visitor with anything but an encouraging expression.

“I dislike to seem rude,” she said, “but I can not imagine any reason which could justify your placing me in this position.”

“The reason is very simple. It is merely that I felt I must see you.”

The young lady’s air became if possible yet more distant.

“You are very flattering,” she said; “but again I must confess that I fail to see any reason—”

“But if *I* see?” he interrupted. “And possibly you will see, too, when I tell you that I am leaving the Sierra without any intention of returning.”

“You are leaving!” There was no doubt that he had wakened interest now. Surprise, inquiry, and something very like sincere pleasure were in Miss Rivers’ eyes as she gazed at him. “Does this mean that you have abandoned the attempt to claim the Santa Cruz?” she asked eagerly.

Armistead shrugged his shoulders.

“Shall we sit down?” he said, as he threw the bridle of his horse over the bough of a tree. “Not-

withstanding the unfriendly reception you have given me, I have much to tell you."

"I did not intend to be unfriendly," she said somewhat apologetically, as she sat down again on the grassy bank from which she had risen at his approach, and he threw himself down beside her. "But you must understand why it is that, considering the position in which you stand, or have stood, toward the owner of *Las Joyas*, I do not think you should have come to see me here."

"I understand perfectly your consideration for the owner of *Las Joyas*," he answered; "and it is because I understand it that I am glad to tell you I have withdrawn from a position which you regard as that of her enemy."

"Then you are really abandoning the claim against the *Santa Cruz*?"

"It does not rest with me to abandon it, but there is at least to be a lull in immediate proceedings. Having learned that the mine is too well defended to make a surprise practicable, I wired Mr. Trafford that I do not care to make an attempt which could not succeed."

"And he—?"

"He has replied that in such case we can only await the result of the legal proceedings which have been instituted. This relieves me of duty here, so I am preparing to leave the country with the sense of having for the first time in my life failed in an object which I set out to accomplish."

The distinct appeal for sympathy in the last words met with no response from Miss Rivers. There was no doubt now of the pleasure that shone in her eyes and curved her lips into smiles.

"There are occasions on which it is better to fail than to succeed," she said. "You are to be congratulated on this failure."

He laughed a little—not mirthfully.

"Failure is not usually a matter for congratulation," he replied; "and yet—I am ready to agree that it may be so in this case, if it brings me success in another far higher, far dearer object." He leaned toward her with a manner, at once ardent and assured, which told Isabel, who was a person of much experience in such matters, what was coming. "You must know," he said, "what the other object is—an object which has supplanted every other in my life, so that for the sake of it I am even glad to fail in this. For I have known how much your feeling has been opposed to me, and the knowledge has been so intolerable that only a stern sense of duty kept me loyal to the task I had undertaken. I hope—I believe—that you have appreciated the difficulty of my position."

"I have always felt sure that you would never have undertaken such a task if you had known how odious it was," Miss Rivers answered.

"Um—er—yes," he assented somewhat doubtfully. "But now that I am relieved—now that I have given it up honorably—I can come to you and

ask to be consoled for failure in one case by success in the other."

Miss Rivers' expression was grave but quite self-possessed.

"I am sorry to plead stupidity," she said, "but I find it almost impossible to think that you can mean—"

"It is impossible that you can doubt what I mean," he interrupted impetuously. "You must have felt with me that our meeting here—we two alone from the same social world—has not been without purpose and significance. You must have recognized that our association has naturally tended to this end—to my laying my life at your feet, and to my—er—hoping that you will give yourself to me."

"I am afraid I am very obtuse," Isabel answered; "but I have really not recognized anything of the kind. Our meeting here has seemed to me altogether accidental and of small importance, and I am extremely sorry if you have entertained hopes which are impossible of fulfilment."

He flushed a sudden angry red as he stared at her.

"You must certainly have known what my hopes have been," he insisted. "Am I to understand that now—at last—you tell me they are impossible of realization?"

The tone even more than the words made Miss Rivers draw herself up a little haughtily.

"I have known nothing of your hopes," she replied; "but if I may judge of them by what you have

just said, I must answer candidly that they are not only impossible of realization, but also very presumptuous."

"Presumptuous!" he repeated, with something like a gasp of anger and amazement.

"I am sorry if the word seems offensive," the young lady went on quietly; "but I can hardly need to remind you that it *is* presumptuous of a man to hope, without positive encouragement, that a woman will accept him."

"And do you venture to say that you have not given me positive encouragement?" he demanded angrily.

"I deny absolutely that I have ever given you any encouragement at all," Miss Rivers answered, "or that such an idea as encouraging you ever entered my mind."

He looked at her for a moment in silence, while the flush left his face and the deep resentment of wounded vanity gathered in his eyes.

"I begin to understand," he said bitterly. "It was all for a purpose—you were making a fool of me, in order that I might tell you my plans and you might betray them. Oh, it is very plain to me now! Lloyd did your errand—warned the mine, so that it prepared for attack, while you coaxed from me a promise of delay."

Isabel rose to her feet, pale, indignant.

"I can pardon a good deal in one who is disappointed," she said, "but you forget yourself too

far. Your charges are both untrue and insulting. You must know it."

"I know that we have all served your purpose," he replied, too resentful, too deeply stung with the humiliation of double failure to care what he said; "and now that I am a defeated man, through your wiles and your efforts, you throw me aside contemptuously. But if you think that I shall endure such treatment, let me tell you that you are mistaken. From this moment the fight against the Santa Cruz will be prosecuted with redoubled vigor, and the end is certain."

"I think that it is," Isabel answered with perfectly recovered dignity; "for the Santa Cruz can be trusted to take care of itself. It stands in no need of assistance from me or from any one. And if this is all that you have to say to me, I will now bid you good-day."

But instead of accepting this dismissal, he stood still and regarded her, almost menacingly.

"It is incredible," he said, "that you are willing to let me go like this! Do you realize what it is to make an enemy of me?"

She measured him with a glance of cool, keen contempt.

"I believe that I do," she replied.

"You fancy that because you have been admired, flattered, spoiled, you can do what you please," he went on; "but I have some social power too, and it will not be a story which will be much to your

credit—the story which I will tell of your doings in the Sierra."

"As a matter purely of curiosity," she said, "I should like to know what you think you have to gain by these threats."

"I have nothing to gain,—nothing!" he returned. "But you have maddened me—you have played with me fooled me, led me on to professional failure—"

"Shall I repeat that your charges are as absurd as they are unfounded?" she said. "I have not played with you, I have not fooled you,—your own vanity alone has done that; and I have certainly not caused your professional failure. That was inevitable. Whoever came here on such an errand as yours would fail."

He bowed ironically.

"Whoever was so unfortunate as to find Miss Rivers opposed to him would certainly be likely to do so; for I see now that we have all been in your hands like puppets pulled by wires. You kept Thornton from entering my employ, while you sent Lloyd to warn the Santa Cruz, and probably also to induce Randolph to desert my service. It has been as good as a play." He laughed the harsh, mirthless laugh which is the extreme expression of intense anger. "And Lloyd—*Lloyd!*—has been cast for the part of hero! Your friends in San Francisco will be interested to hear of this; they will find a spice of the charming inconsistency for which Miss Rivers is famous in the fact that while posing

as the champion of Trafford's divorced Indian wife, your most intimate associate and favored admirer has been a ruined, discredited, divorced man!"

"How dare you!"

White to the lips with indignation, Isabel could only utter these words. For the first time in her sheltered life she found herself face to face with the unveiled brutality of a man's passion, and for the first time self-possession and readiness of speech deserted her. Her eyes blazed as she looked at Armitstead. But his last words had contained more than an insult: they carried also a shock, from which she felt herself trembling from head to foot, and under the effect of which movement and speech seemed to become impossible. She was conscious of wondering if there was no escape—if she must stand as a target for more of these insults,—when a hand was suddenly slipped into her arm, and a voice, cold and cutting as steel, spoke beside her.

"Señor," said Victoria; "you will instantly leave the lands of Las Joyas. I tolerated your presence here when I thought that you came as the friend of the señorita; but since you have come to annoy and insult her—for your voice has told me that, though I have not understood your words,—you must go, or I shall call my men yonder"—she pointed to some laborers in a field not far off—"to make you go."

There was an instant's pause, filled with the soft rustle of the leaves over their heads. Nothing could

have enraged Armistead more than this climax to an interview which already mortified him beyond endurance. To obey Victoria's command was intolerable. Yet to disregard it was only to bring on himself worse humiliation ; for the determination in the dark eyes was as unmistakable as their command. He seized the bridle of his horse and turned to Miss Rivers.

“The intervention of your savage friend was unnecessary,” he said. “I was about to take my departure. I believe there is nothing else for me to say except to offer my congratulations on the success of your efforts, and to hope that you will be pleased with their final result.”

Then he mounted and rode away, leaving the girls standing together under the arching shade, beside the crystal water.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LLOYD BRINGS A WARNING.

AM afraid that you are tired of Las Joyas, señorita."

Miss Rivers started and looked around. She was seated on the corridor of the *casa grande*—the great, white-arched corridor which ran along the front of the house and commanded such a wide view of the valley and mountains,—and she had been so absorbed in thought, with her gaze fixed on the sunset fires burning above the great hills, that she had not heard Victoria's approach, which indeed had been silent. Now she found the girl sitting beside her on the bench where she was seated.

"Tired!" she repeated quickly. "Why do you think such a thing? How could I be tired of Las Joyas? It is the most beautiful place I have ever seen."

"But it must be dull to you," Victoria said; "and it has seemed to me that for the last few days you have been *triste*—sad, do you not say?—as if you were tired."

"I am not tired, but disgusted," Miss Rivers replied.

"Disgusted!" Victoria repeated, opening her dark eyes.

"With myself, not with *Las Joyas*," Isabel explained. "And there is nothing more disagreeable than to be disgusted with oneself. One can support things with philosophy when one is disgusted only with others or with the world in general; but when one's self-esteem has received a shock, and one feels that instead of displaying the wisdom of prudence and other admirable qualities of which one has fancied oneself possessed, one has displayed just the opposite of all these—well, then disgust sets in with deadly earnestness, and even the Sierra ceases to have power to charm."

"But why should you feel this disgust?" Victoria asked. "What has happened to make you think such things of yourself?"

"You know what has happened. You know of the visit of that detestable man."

"I know you have not been the same since he was here, but I do not know why his visit should have affected you so much."

"It is rather hard to tell," said Miss Rivers, after a pause. "In the first place, it made me feel that I had interfered with matters which did not concern me, and had—as we say in English—made a fool of myself."

"That," said Victoria, with conviction, "you could not do."

"Oh, yes, I could—I can—with great completeness! I have laid myself open to misapprehension—not that I mind that at all,—I have found out how

odious a man's admiration can become; I have learned that one should not suffer oneself to grow interested in mysteries, for they are likely to prove commonplace and disgusting; and—altogether I feel that the Santa Cruz could have got on very well without my aid, and that I should be much more comfortable if I had let it alone."

"I don't understand all that you mean," said Victoria, who was indeed very much puzzled; "but I am sure that you are mistaken about the Santa Cruz. There can be no doubt that you saved the mine when you sent Mr. Lloyd to warn us—"

"And nearly caused his death," said Isabel, with a somewhat hysterical laugh. "Don't let us forget that. Oh, I *am* tired—tired of it all!" she cried suddenly, passionately in English. "And I feel as if it were not over—as if trouble, tragedy were yet to come."

She rose with an abrupt movement and walked to the edge of the corridor, where, leaning against a pillar, she looked out over the darkening landscape. The wide solemnity of the plain and hills and bending sky failed for once to impart their tranquillity to her. She was filled with a restlessness which she did not understand, as well as the disgust of which she had spoken to Victoria. As a matter of fact, what she was tasting was that bitter sense of the unsatisfactoriness of all things, which few persons are so fortunate as to go through life without knowing, but which had never assailed her before. For

there could be no doubt that she had heretofore lived very much on the surface of existence,—in an atmosphere of admiration, of acknowledged queenship, which made life seem a very roseate and satisfactory thing indeed. And now, suddenly, the shielding veil was torn aside and she saw life as it was,—felt rather than perceived its ugly depths, its hardness and its pain. Armistead's abrupt change from the flattering deference which is the outward attitude of many men toward women, to the coarse brutality which is their inward attitude, had enlightened her even more than it angered her. Anger was reserved for another man,—for one who had ventured to approach her—to rouse her pity, her sympathy, her interest, while having upon him a stigma from which of all things she shrank most; against which, as she had once said, her taste revolted as much as her faith condemned. Justice after a while would remind her how carefully he had abstained from any attempt to rouse this interest; but just now she was only conscious of the unreasonable anger and the deep-seated disgust.

Meanwhile Victoria, who had come again to her side with silent tread, was listening to a sound which, though still far off, was momentarily drawing nearer; and she suddenly spoke.

“Some one is riding fast,” she said. “That is not common in the Sierra.”

Isabel glanced at the speaker quickly. She had not heard the sound; but this did not surprise her,

for she had learned the difference between Victoria's ear and her own.

"Is the rider coming from the mine?" she asked.

"No," Victoria answered: "from the other direction—from Urbeleja."

"Ah!" Isabel knew that at Urbeleja was the one telegraph office—established in a cave—in this part of the Sierra, and her thoughts leaped at once to a conclusion. "It is a dispatch, perhaps."

"Perhaps," Victoria responded, but doubtfully and without any trace of anxiety. Dispatches were infrequent and meant little at Las Joyas.

Then the sound reached Isabel's ears, and to her the rapid beat of the horse's hoofs as he galloped along the valley seemed filled with the suggestion of haste, of trouble, of all the wearing cares of life and civilization which even the great hills could not keep back. She found herself listening intently, the same question in her mind as in Victoria's—would the rider pass the gate of Las Joyas or would he enter?

It was a question soon answered. The rapid hoof-beats ceased—that was for the opening of the gate,—and then were heard again, advancing across the valley toward the house. And now, too, the figure of a horse and rider could be perceived even through the gathering dusk. Isabel turned to her companion, as sure of the keenness of her glance as of her ear.

"Who is it?" she asked.

But Victoria did not answer at once. Indeed the twilight made identification difficult even for her vision, so that it was not until the horseman rode up before the corridor that she exclaimed:

“It is the Señor Lloyd!”

It was a joyful exclamation—so joyful that even her quick ear did not catch the sharp indrawing of her companion’s breath. At this moment Miss Rivers would have given much if a way of retreat had been open to her. But, consistent with dignity, there was none. So she stood silent—a quiet, dignified figure in the dusk,—as Lloyd dismounted and came forward. He shook hands with Victoria, whose eager, cordial welcome left nothing to be desired; and then, as he took the hand which Miss Rivers extended, something like a shock passed over him. He could not see her face very distinctly, and there had been nothing to warn him of any change in her feeling toward him; but when he felt the cool, light touch of her fingers—so reluctantly given, so hastily withdrawn, so entirely without the magnetic cordiality which is felt in the hand-clasp of friends,—he knew that a change had occurred. For the brief instant that he held her hand he glanced at her questioningly.

“How do you do, Mr. Lloyd?” she said. “This is very unexpected, seeing you at Las Joyas.

“My coming is unexpected to me,” he answered. Then he turned to Victoria. “Is Don Mariano here?” he asked.

"No," she replied. "He is at the *hacienda de beneficio*. The *conducta* for Culiacan started to-day, and there has been much business needing attention."

"Ah! the *conducta* started to-day!" said Lloyd. He was silent for a moment, as if reflecting. "Don Arturo, then?—he is here?" he asked.

"Yes, Arturo is here," said Victoria with evident surprise, her voice indicating what her next words expressed plainly. "What do you want with Don Mariano or with Arturo that I can not do?"

"I only want to say a few words to one or the other of them," Lloyd answered. "Indeed I think I will ask Don Arturo to ride on with me to the *hacienda de beneficio*."

"Something is the matter," said Victoria quickly. "What is it? You have no right to withhold from me any news about the mine."

"I am not sure that anything is the matter," Lloyd replied; "and it is because I am not sure that I did not want to disturb or annoy you. I have had a warning which may amount to nothing—"

"A warning that the mine is to be attacked?"

"It is really hardly more than a rumor; but I wish to be sure that Don Mariano is on his guard. So if I may ask you to call Arturo; we will ride on—"

"You must come in," Victoria interposed peremptorily. "Arturo can go immediately. But you

must rest and take refreshment; for you have been riding hard to reach here—”

He laughed a little.

“How do you know that?” he asked. “But for the sake of my horse—yes, you can take him, Pancho,—I will wait a little, if Arturo goes on at once.”

“He shall go,” the girl said; and, turning hastily, entered the house.

There was an instant’s pause of silence with the two left together on the corridor. Then Miss Rivers said in a voice which she strove to make as usual, but in which to Lloyd’s ear there was a suggestion of delicate ice:

“What is the meaning of this? How did the warning reach you? I ask because a day or two ago I—I heard that Mr. Armistead had abandoned his intention of taking the mine by force and had left the Sierra.”

“So you heard that?” said Lloyd. He glanced at her quickly and keenly, as she stood, a graceful, white-clad figure in the dusk. “I, too, heard something of the kind; but there is reason to believe that we were misinformed or that Armistead has changed his mind.”

“I was not misinformed,” said Isabel; “but it is possible that Mr. Armistead may have changed his mind. Please tell me what you know.”

“Really not very much,” Lloyd answered. “Perhaps I should begin by telling you that when I left

you in the Sierra and went back to the Quebrada Onda, I found that the party there *was* Randolph's—that is, Armistead's—on its way to attempt the surprise of the Santa Cruz."

"Ah!" she exclaimed quickly. "Then he never meant to keep his promise to me! I am glad of that."

Lloyd did not ask why she was glad; he only went on quietly:

"I told Randolph that he would find the mine thoroughly prepared to resist attack; and he—acting to a certain degree on his own responsibility, and knowing that he could not count on his men in such an event—decided to turn back and await direct orders from Armistead."

Even the twilight could not hide the flash in Miss Rivers' eyes. The ice seemed to be thawing as she said eagerly:

"And then—?"

"Well, then we rode together back to Canelas," said Lloyd. He hesitated a moment,—it seemed difficult for him to go on. "I think I told you that I thought it possible I knew the man—Randolph, I mean," he continued, with an effort which was plain to her. "I found that it was he—the man I had known many years ago, and who was connected with certain passages in my life. At that time he had been very much under my influence—until he fell under the influence of another person—and perhaps the old feeling revived. At all events, he

decided after hearing my opinion of this matter, to resign his service with Armistead. It was after this that Armistead made up his mind to abandon any further attempt against the Santa Cruz."

"I see!" She did not tell him what she saw, as she gazed across the night-shadowed valley toward the forest-clad heights which overhung the sleeping pools; but he divined that it was something that had to do with her own information of Armistead's intentions. "And now," she went on quickly, as her glance returned to his and he felt again the dilating flash of her brilliant eyes, "what reason have you for thinking that he has changed his mind again?"

"The reason of a dispatch from Randolph, who is still in Canelas, which reached me at Urbeleja to-day. When I returned to the Sierra I told him to advise me of anything he heard—"

"Yes, yes. And he has heard—?"

"That Armistead has wired a certain unscrupulous Mexican—Pedro Sanchez—to collect the men already employed and bring them to him in the Sierra. It looks as if he intends to make an attempt, after all, to seize the Santa Cruz; probably counting on the fact of his intention to abandon any such attempt being known at the mine and so putting them off guard. I am more inclined to believe this since I hear that the *conducta* has left to-day—carrying, of course, a number of the best men with it."

"I am sure that you are right," said Isabel. "It

is all perfectly plain. He came here a few days ago—oh, yes, he ventured even that!—to tell me that he was leaving the Sierra, having given up all intention of trying to take the Santa Cruz. Perhaps this was really his intention when he came; but—afterward he determined for many reasons that he would not go away defeated; that he would take advantage of the news of his withdrawal being known at the mine—of guard being, therefore, probably relaxed—to surprise and seize it. In his anger he permitted himself to say something before he left—to make a threat which should have prepared me for some such action on his part."

"This settles it," said Lloyd. "I haven't the least doubt now that he hopes to find the mine unguarded, and so surprise it—probably to-night."

"But if you have just had your dispatch from Canelas, the men can not have reached him—"

"That dispatch, unfortunately, has been lying at Urbeleja for two or three days. I only reached there to-day."

"Then the danger is pressing?"

"Very pressing. I think I had better see why Arturo delays."

He turned toward the open door of the house as he spoke, but at the moment Victoria appeared in it.

"Don Felipe," she said, "my mother wishes to speak to you." Then she extended her hand to Isabel. "You will come too, señorita," she added.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DOÑA BEATRIZ GIVES HER ORDERS.

IT was a scene Isabel Rivers never forgot—that which awaited them when they entered the great court of the house. Here deeper shadows than those outside had gathered; and the lamps hanging at intervals in the corridors had been lighted, bringing out the massive walls, the forms of the arches, the dim distances where silent draped figures passed to and fro,—the whole atmosphere of almost Oriental strangeness, mystery and picturesqueness which always appealed to her so strongly. And under one of the swinging iron lamps stood a figure which seemed to embody every suggestion of the background—the stately figure of Doña Beatriz; the folds of the rebozo which covered her head and draped her shoulders lending a statuesque grace to her aspect; while her finely-cut face and deep, dark eyes were full of the expression of some strong emotion. Near her, leaning against one of the pillars which supported the arches, was Arturo, his whole attitude, as well as the look of his handsome countenance, eloquent of anger, protest, indignation. The scene appeared to Isabel's quick, imaginative sense as if set for a drama, alive with the strife of strong wills

and vital issues; but, with the consciousness of having herself no other part to play than that of spectator, she sank down on one of the benches ranged against the wall, while her companions went forward into the mingled radiance and shadow of the lamplight.

Doña Beatriz held out her hand to Lloyd with a gesture of cordial greeting.

“Señor,” she said in her full, sweet voice, “you are always welcome at Las Joyas, but never more welcome than when you come as a true friend to bring us a warning.”

“I am happy, señora, if my warning has come in time to be of service,” Lloyd answered, with a deference and grace of manner which the spectator thought altogether worthy of the occasion. “But I would suggest that Don Arturo should lose no time in going to the mine—”

“I should have been on the road now,” Arturo interposed abruptly, “if Doña Beatriz had not interfered and said—said—oh, I can not repeat it! It is past patience!” the young man cried, with all the indignation which clearly possessed him finding expression in his voice.

Doña Beatriz turned with an air of gentle command and laid her hand on his arm.

“Be quiet, Arturo!” she said. Then she looked at Lloyd. “He is not willing to go,” she explained, “because he does not wish to carry my orders to the mine.”

"No!" Arturo said violently. "I will not carry such orders! If we are forbidden to defend the mine, I, for one, will not go near it!"

"Forbidden to defend the mine!" Lloyd repeated with astonishment. He glanced from Doña Beatriz to Victoria. The girl had stepped to her mother's side, as if to support her in whatever she might say; but her eyes were downcast, so that she did not meet his glance; and it was plain from her compressed lips that she found it difficult not to echo Arturo's indignant protest. Lloyd looked again at Doña Beatriz. "That surely can not be your order, señora?" he said. "It is impossible!"

"My order," Doña Beatriz replied, "is that no blood shall be shed to defend my property. If those who come to take the mine can be repulsed without bloodshed, let it be done; but I will not incur the responsibility of sending any soul out of the world for such a cause."

"But the responsibility will not be yours," Lloyd said. "It will belong to those who are the aggressors in the matter."

"It will be theirs chiefly,—I know that," she answered. "But it will be mine also, if I suffer myself to be forced into deeds of violence. I have thought much of this, señor; I have suffered much and prayed much, and it is very clear to me: I can not allow blood to be shed in this struggle."

"Do you, then, intend to give up your mine to

those who are probably now on their way to surprise and seize it?" Lloyd asked.

"I would rather give it up than that any one should be killed either in its defence or among those who come to take it," she replied firmly.

"But they come knowing the risk they run; and they come, señora—do not forget this,—with arms in their hands. They are ready to kill, and therefore if they should be killed it would be no more than justice."

Doña Beatriz' eyes were full of a strange, lovely light as she looked at him.

"Even if so," she said, "it is not for me to deal justice to them. That I leave to God. Let Him judge between me and those who come to injure me. My cause is in His hands, and I desire nothing—nothing—but that His will may be done."

"You can not think," Lloyd urged, "that it is the will of God that you should be robbed."

"That, señor," she returned quietly, "I do not know, and neither do you. It is often the will of God that we should suffer loss of many things. He has already permitted me to lose much, to which the Santa Cruz, with all its wealth, is as nothing, but, while He permits this, I am sure there is one thing He does not permit, and that is that I shall defend myself or my property by any act of wrong-doing."

There was a moment's pause. Every one of those present shared more or less in the indignant anger

and protest which Arturo had so openly and vehemently expressed; yet every one was touched, almost awed into silence, by the attitude of this woman, by the loftiness of the spirit with which she met the culminating injury which confronted her. Lloyd, conscious of admiration and exasperation in equal proportion, turned to the silent girl, who stood by the side of the noble figure, mutely supporting even while mutely protesting.

"Doña Victoria," he said, "can you not persuade your mother that there is no wrongdoing in defending her just rights?"

In response to this appeal, Victoria lifted her eyes and met his gaze, throwing back her head a little as she did so. Her expression was sad but proud.

"Señor," she answered, "my mother has spoken for me in speaking for herself. What she says, I must say also."

"Ah!" It was Isabel Rivers who uttered this quick, irrepressible exclamation, which conveyed to one ear at least the passionate admiration it expressed. For who knew so well as she what those words meant,—she who had won her way deep into the heart of the Mexican girl; who had seen its fiery passion, its strength of fierce determination laid bare? And having seen, having sympathized with all which was in that heart, she now felt herself thrilled, as we can be thrilled only by that which touches upon the heroic, by this brief utterance, which expressed such intense loyalty of affection, such difficult submission, such hard self-conquest.

Lloyd, on his part, quietly bowed.

"In that case," he said, "I can offer no further advice."

"But my mother does not mean," Victoria went on eagerly, "that we are ungrateful for your warning, or that we mean to disregard it. She has asked Arturo to go to the mine, to see that the men are in readiness for an attack—"

"But to forbid them to use their weapons—to request them to permit themselves to be shot down without resistance!" Arturo interrupted bitterly. "I refuse to carry such an order. You understand, señor, that it is absurd—that the men will never submit—it is asking too much of them. If they are forbidden to defend the mine in the only way in which it can be defended, they will throw down their arms and leave it, and no one could blame them."

"It is true," Lloyd said, addressing Doña Beatriz. "If you wish to give up your mine, you have the right to do so, but you have not the right to forbid these men who are in your service to defend themselves. That, as Don Arturo says, is asking too much."

Doña Beatriz looked at him with a sudden passion of appeal in her gaze.

"What am I to do, señor?" she asked. "How can I endure to bring upon my soul the guilt of shedding blood? Ah, you do not know," she cried,

"what I have suffered from the fear of this! It has deprived me of peace by day and of sleep by night; but I have hoped and prayed that it might not come,—that, knowing we were prepared for resistance, those who thought to surprise the mine would not make the attempt. And I had begun to think that my prayers were answered and to have a little peace of mind and soul; and now—now—"she suddenly broke down and flung herself weeping into a chair near by. "God has not heard my prayer," she said, "and I know not what to do!"

Lloyd and Victoria looked at each other across her bowed head. If there had been appeal in the mother's eyes a moment before, there was much deeper appeal now in the daughter's—an appeal which Lloyd read clearly: "Is there no way to help her?—no way to lift this burden of frightful responsibility which is crushing her who has already borne so much?" Victoria's gaze asked with a mute passion which, together with the sobs of the woman whose self-control had so suddenly yielded under the strain laid upon it, stirred Lloyd's chivalry to its depths. And the girl, whose eyes were fastened upon his, was conscious of this,—conscious that her appeal was understood and answered; conscious of a magnetic current of comfort and sympathy; an assurance of the help she asked—a sense of reliance—a conviction that he would relieve this sensitive soul of the fears which tortured it. She seemed to know what he would say when he bent down to Doña Beatriz.

"Don't be so much distressed, señora," he said gently. "There is—there must be a way out of this difficulty without the bloodshed which you fear. Will you trust me to find it for you?"

Doña Beatriz looked at him, and words ever after failed her to say all that she read in the face bending over her.

"Señor," she replied, "if you can find it, I will thank and bless and pray for you always."

"Then it is settled," he returned, smiling—"especially about the prayers." He turned around. "Don Arturo," he said, "Doña Beatriz is good enough to entrust me with the management of this matter. Will you order another horse for me—I fear mine is too tired to go farther,—and prepare yourself to accompany me to the mine?"

"And order my mule, Arturo. I will go also," Victoria said.

Lloyd turned to her quickly.

"Let me beg that you will do nothing of the kind," he said. "The mine—to-night—is no place for you."

"You are mistaken," she answered quietly. "It is the place for me, not only because it is my right to be there, but also because the men obey no one as they obey me."

"Nevertheless," he urged earnestly, "there is no need—"

"There is need," she interrupted, drawing her dark brows together with the expression of determination he knew so well. "And even if there were

not, nothing could prevent me from going. Arturo, order my mule."

Half an hour later—for Doña Beatriz insisted that Lloyd should take some supper before leaving the house again—the saddled animals were before the door; and he came out to them, carrying with him a sense of disappointment and pain; for he had looked around the corridors for Miss Rivers in order to say a farewell word, and had failed to find her. Putting this avoidance—for he was sure it could be nothing else—together with the new coldness which he had heard in her voice and felt in her manner when they met at the time of his arrival, he felt a conviction that something had occurred to change her feeling toward him—that frank, delightful friendly feeling which had been to him like water in the desert to the thirsty,—and to make her withhold even a word of interest and Godspeed when he was leaving on an errand which at another time would have commanded her keenest sympathy.

Many men would have found solace for disappointment in recalling time-worn and not wholly unjustified sayings about feminine variableness and caprice; but Lloyd knew Isabel Rivers better than to think, or even pretend to think, that such sayings could be applicable to her. Neither variableness nor caprice had place or part in her, he was sure; so it followed that she must have a reason for this great change, and that reason he instinctively knew to be a serious one. It was, therefore, with a keen con-

sciousness of the disappointment and pain already mentioned that, having shaken hands with Doña Beatriz, and assured her again that he would do everything in his power to fulfil her wishes, he walked out to the corridor where the horses waited—and there found two feminine figures already mounted.

He paused for an instant, amazed and startled. Then he walked up to the side of the one whom even in the obscurity of night there was no mistaking.

“Miss Rivers,” he said gravely, “pardon me for telling you that this is a great mistake. You should not think of going to the mine to-night.”

“I supposed you would probably say so,” Miss Rivers replied calmly; “and so I took care to be mounted and ready to start when you came out. Since Victoria goes, I am going with her.”

“I must remind you that the cases are very different. I disapprove of Doña Victoria’s going, but she has the right of the owner to be there.”

“And I have the right of the friend of the owner,” Isabel returned lightly and coolly. “Please don’t delay us by arguing the matter, Mr. Lloyd. I am going.”

“I am sure that your father would never permit—”

“My father, fortunately, is in Tópia,” the young lady interrupted, “and I am not aware that he has delegated his power to—any one. Frankly, I would

not miss this for anything; so it is really quite useless for you to say another word."

Still Lloyd persevered in saying another word.

"Don't you understand—have you no idea—what may take place there to-night, in spite of anything I can do?" he urged in a low tone. "I beg that you will stay! I beg that you will keep Doña Victoria here if possible!"

Isabel leaned toward him, and he saw the glow of strong excitement dilating and shining in her eyes.

"Do you mean," she whispered, "that there may be danger?"

Lloyd made the great mistake of misunderstanding her.

"Yes," he answered, "there may be danger. It will certainly be no time—no place for women. Most earnestly I beg you—"

Miss Rivers straightened herself in her saddle.

"Danger is not exactly an argument with me for deserting my friends," she said. "On the contrary, it is an added reason for staying with them. Nothing, I am sure, can prevent Victoria from going, and I shall certainly go with her. I think you had better mount, Mr. Lloyd. This is waste of time."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE WAY TO THE SANTA CRUZ.

OUT into the night—the marvellous, starlit night—the party rode, the sound of their horses' tread echoing through the stillness which held the earth, as it were, under a spell; while all the freshness of the forests, the resinous odor of the pines, the fragrance of unnumbered plants, flowers and vines along the margins of the streams, came to them on the sweet, cool air which fanned their faces as they rode. In the clear radiance of the starlight every object was distinctly visible,—every fold of the great hills, every crest which cut against the violet sky, so “thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,” every group of trees on the wide expanse of the valley. It seemed to Isabel Rivers that nothing could possibly have been more glorious than the purple splendor of the night; nothing more full of poetic suggestion, of the great mystery, silence and beauty of Nature, than the outlines of the towering hills, the sleeping woods. It also seemed to her that life could hold no physical delight more keen than that of riding in the wonderful starshine through these wild, lovely scenes on the errand which took them forth. For the love of adventure,

always strongly alive in her, was to-night quickened into a passion which helped to produce the sense of exhilaration that filled her veins like wine.

As may readily be imagined, however, no such exhilaration filled Lloyd's veins. On the contrary, he was conscious of a very distinct sense of depression and regret as he rode across the valley toward the *hacienda de beneficio* and the cañon of the Santa Cruz. If he had not been a fool, so he remarked with unflattering candor to himself, he would not have gone to the *casa grande*, but would have continued on his way to the mine, where his business lay,—if indeed he could be said to have any business in the matter, which just now he was strongly inclined to doubt. In that case none of the present complications would have arisen: Doña Beatriz' very inconvenient scruples would not have asserted themselves; he would not have been led to make a promise which it was exceedingly disagreeable to him to attempt to fulfil; and—above all and most conducive to vexation!—he would not have brought upon himself the embarrassing companionship of two obstinate young women, neither of whom had any fit part in such an expedition, and one of whom was most particularly and grievously out of place.

Absorbed with these reflections, he rode silently and alone in the rear of the party until they reached the *hacienda de beneficio*. Here, filing through the great gateway into the large, dimly-lighted *patio*, they were met by Don Mariano, who, followed by

two or three other men, came hurriedly out of the office at the sound of a cavalcade riding into the court. His surprise was extreme when he recognized the members of the party, and his strong face set grimly when he heard Lloyd's story. He turned at once to Arturo.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sharply. "Why have you not ridden on to the mine to see that the men are prepared for an attack?"

Arturo shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not ridden on," he answered, "because some strange commands have been given. Doña Beatriz orders that the men shall not use their rifles."

"What!" Don Mariano fell back a step in his amazement. "Not use their rifles! How, then, are they to defend the mine?"

"They can not defend it," the young man replied. "And that is why I have refused to carry such an order."

Don Mariano turned to Victoria, his dark eyes glowing with sudden fire.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Has your mother lost her senses? Is she ready to give up the mine?"

"Even if she were ready to give it up, it is her own and she has a right to do so," the girl answered; "but her orders have no such meaning. She only desires that there shall be no blood shed in its defence."

“Bah!” said the man, who had been a soldier in the days of strife which are not so far gone that they can not be clearly remembered in Mexico. “This is what comes of having to do with women! Arturo, ride at once to the mine and have the men armed and ready—”

“No!” Victoria cried, as she drew her mule across the gateway. “You shall not carry such an order in face of my mother’s positive command to the contrary. Don Mariano, you forget yourself! My mother’s authority is supreme here.”

Don Mariano glared at her fiercely.

“Your mother is a woman,” he said, “and does not know—”

“She is the owner of the Santa Cruz,” Victoria interrupted, “and that is all that matters.”

“It appears that she begins to doubt whether or not she *is* the owner,” Don Mariano returned bitterly.

“She has never for an instant doubted it, or she would not have held the mine,” the girl answered. “But the fear of strife has tortured her, and now at last she declares that she will sooner lose the mine than bring any stain of blood-guiltiness on her soul.”

“And have you turned coward too?” Don Mariano asked with fierce bitterness.

To those looking on, there did not seem that there could be a question of cowardice in connection with

the proud face and dauntless eyes which answered even before the lips.

“What my mother says, I say,” Victoria replied, as she had replied in the *patio* of Las Joyas. “You know well that if left to myself I would defend the mine at any cost, but I would rather give it up forever than add the least weight to her burden of suffering. And this would be the worst suffering of all; for it would touch her conscience, which has always heretofore been at peace. Do you think I would do that for all the wealth of the Santa Cruz? In this matter no one is concerned but my mother and myself, and I am here to see that her orders are obeyed.”

Involuntarily Lloyd and Isabel Rivers glanced at each other, and each read in the eyes of the other the same quick, passionate admiration which had thrilled both at Las Joyas. It was a feeling in which Don Mariano did not share, but he fell back and motioned toward the gate.

“Go, then!” he said. “Go and give your orders at the mine. I will stay here.”

He was striding back to the office when Lloyd rode up to him.

“Don Mariano,” he said earnestly, “let me beg that you will go to the mine. Your presence there is absolutely necessary to keep order and to resist attack, if an attack should be made—”

Don Mariano turned upon him fiercely.

“How is it possible to resist attack without using weapons?” he demanded.

“If it came to a question of self-defence, I am sure Doña Beatriz would not desire that the men should not use their weapons,” Lloyd replied. “But I have promised her that I will try to prevent any such necessity—”

“You!” Don Mariano interrupted. “How can you prevent it?”

“I may not succeed in preventing it,” Lloyd answered; “but I will make the attempt. And in order to do so it is my intention to go out in search of the men whom we have reason to believe are coming, instead of waiting for them to reach the mine.”

Don Mariano looked up curiously into the quiet face looking down at him.

“And when you find them, señor—what then?”

“Then,” Lloyd answered, “I will try to bring some arguments to bear on their leader which may possibly change his purpose. If I fail—well, we shall only be where we are now; but I have promised that I will make the attempt. Meanwhile I hope that you will go to the mine, for I want Don Arturo to come with me.”

Quiet as the face and voice both were, there was a wonderfully compelling power in them which Don Mariano found it impossible to resist.

“Very well,” he replied: “I will go to the mine. But if an attack is made on it, I refuse absolutely

to be bound by or to regard Doña Beatriz' orders about the use of firearms."

"I am sure," said Lloyd, significantly, "that you will respect Doña Beatriz' wishes *as far as possible*. She would certainly not ask the men to allow themselves to be overpowered without making any resistance. Now I will take Don Arturo and go—"

"Stop!" said Don Mariano. "Do you know where to go?"

"Only the general direction."

"Then I advise you to wait until the party has been located. I will send some men out as scouts who know the Sierra thoroughly. They will soon find exactly where the party is, and you will do well to wait until you have their report."

Recognizing the wisdom of this suggestion, Lloyd agreed; and a few minutes later, with the addition of Don Mariano and several men from the hacienda, the cavalcade was again in motion and riding toward the Santa Cruz.

Before leaving the mill, an effort had been made to induce Victoria and Miss Rivers to return to Las Joyas; but since Victoria positively refused to do so, Isabel also announced her intention of going on to the mine; and this time Lloyd made no protest when she declared her resolution. Silently they filed out of the great gateway, which closed with a loud clang behind them, and rode toward the mouth of the dark cañon between the heights.

And if this cañon was dark and forbidding in daylight, it was almost appalling in the gloom which now filled it; for the night, so glorious and radiant out on the wide plain, was here terrible in its enveloping shade, its suggestions and possibilities of danger. Into the deep, narrow defile the starlight had no power to penetrate; and the roar of the torrent in its depths seemed intensified and menacing in sound as it rose between the rocky walls. Brave as she was, Isabel Rivers felt her heart sink a little, and the sense of adventure became somewhat less delightful as the road entered the cañon and she remembered the narrowness of the shelf along which the trail lay, and the depth of the abyss that yawned below. It was with intense relief that she was suddenly conscious of a hand laid lightly on her bridle, of a figure walking at the head of her mule along the perilous way. Even in the darkness she knew that figure; and, although no word was spoken, she was conscious of a confidence which banished fear as she felt herself led along the unseen path, with the outlines of rugged heights towering above, and the loud clamor of furious waters below.

It was an experience she was never likely to forget, this silent ride through the darkness of the wild defile; nor yet the scene which suddenly burst upon their view as the last turn of the way brought them in sight of the mine. The foremost riders had already reached the *patio*, and had lighted some

torches of resinous pine—prepared and always kept in readiness by the men,—the red glare of which now lighted up all the mighty escarpment of the mountain and the towering cross on its great pile of boulders.

“Oh, how wonderful!” Isabel cried, when she first caught sight of the marvellously picturesque effect.

She spoke to herself, but the tall figure walking beside the head of her mule heard and glanced back at her.

“It is wonderful, isn’t it?” said Lloyd. “What a scene for a painter!”

“What a scene to remember always!” she said, her gaze riveted in fascination upon it. “Who could have dreamed of anything so wildly picturesque, so terribly grand?” Then she lifted her eyes to the great dominating cross. “*In hoc signo vinces!*” she murmured softly.

Again Lloyd caught her words; and, remembering how they had come to his own mind, his own lips, when he first saw the cross of the Santa Cruz, he smiled a little. There certainly was a wonderful sympathy of thought and feeling between Miss Rivers and himself.

“Yes,” he said, “I believe that in and by that sign the Santa Cruz will conquer; but I understand why Doña Beatriz does not wish that the symbol of peace should look down upon conflict and possible bloodshed.”

"I also understand now," Isabel answered. "One can not look at that cross and think of all that it signifies without understanding. Doña Beatriz has not only looked at it long, but borne it as well, and there is wonderful wisdom to be learned from a cross borne heroically. I suppose that what she wishes to do is to leave her cause in the hands of God. But do you believe that those men yonder"—she pointed to the group of figures in the *patio*—"will be satisfied to do so?"

Lloyd shook his head.

"I am sure they will not," he said; "for, despite their deep and earnest faith, human passions are exceedingly strong in them. And if ever such passions were justified, it is in this case of the Santa Cruz."

"It seems so to me," Isabel remarked; "and yet"—her glance again sought the great cross—"one can comprehend the higher, the more heroic view."

They had by this time almost reached the point of entrance into the *patio*; and Lloyd, suddenly bringing the mule to a halt, looked up into her face.

"Miss Rivers," he said, "I am foolish, perhaps, to expose myself to another rebuff, another reminder that I have no right to offer advice to you; but I must venture to beg that you will remain outside the *patio* of the mine. We are hoping that no struggle will occur here; but the fact remains that if the attacking party suddenly appears, a struggle *will* take place; and, despite Doña Beatriz' orders, it

will be a desperate and probably a bloody one. The *patio* will, of course, be the scene of it; and, considering the possibility of this, I hope you will overlook my presumption in advising you, and heed the advice."

"I am afraid that I don't quite understand what your advice is Mr. Lloyd," Isabel answered, with more meekness than he had expected. "Remain outside the *patio*! But where can I remain? Surely not on this narrow trail?"

"Certainly not," Lloyd replied. He turned promptly and guided the mule up the mountain side, where a path led to some old workings of the mine. He found this path by accident rather than design, and followed its steep way for probably fifty feet. Then he halted suddenly by the side of an immense boulder, firmly imbedded on the steep mountain side. "Here," he said, "is a throne which has been waiting for you from the beginning of time."

"It would certainly seem a pity not to occupy it, then," Isabel answered lightly, as taking her foot from the stirrup, she held out her hands to be assisted from the saddle.

A moment later she was seated on the flat top of the great rock; and as Lloyd led the mule away, he said:

"I will now find Doña Victoria."

CHAPTER XXIX.

“I ASK NOTHING.”

THEY were a few strange, silent minutes which Isabel Rivers knew, seated alone in the darkness on her rock on the mountain side. After she heard, rather than saw, Lloyd fasten her mule to a tree near by and then go down again to the trail and on to the *patio* of the mine, she felt herself in a solitude as complete as if she had been leagues distant from any other human being. All around her was the deep silence of the everlasting hills, the great steeps rising to the sky, the encompassing forest which seemed waiting in breathless stillness for some event—some happening. She found herself unconsciously holding her breath as she waited too for what was to come.

What came presently was a step returning along the path which led to her rocky perch, and a moment later Lloyd's presence beside her on the boulder.

“I have come back,” he said, “to tell you that Doña Victoria is not willing to leave the mine, and to ask what you wish to do—to join her or to remain here?”

"I thought," said Miss Rivers, quietly, "that you advised my remaining here."

"So I did—so I do; but you may not like to remain here alone."

"Why not? It might be more interesting at the mine, but I have found it very interesting here—so strange and eerie—"

Lloyd laughed a little.

"You are very brave," he said. "Most women would find the eeriness more frightful than interesting, I fancy. But are you really willing to stay here alone?"

"I am quite willing for the present at least. I feel as if I were occupying a proscenium box overlooking the stage where a drama is about to take place. Of course"—her tone changed—"that is a flippant way of putting it; but I should be somewhat out of place at the mine, whereas here I can see everything that takes place and yet not be seen. I am obliged to you for suggesting my stopping at this point."

"Are you?" said Lloyd. "I am glad of that; for you have not been obliged to me for my other suggestions to-night."

"Certainly not," she answered with emphasis. "How could you think that I would either stay at Las Joyas or return there, with all this exciting business going on?"

"Your father—"

"We will not consider my father, if you please. Happily, as I remarked before, he is at Tópia. We know what his sentiments would be if he were here; but—happily again!—he isn't here."

"He would certainly disapprove of *your* being here."

"As much as possible. He has disapproved from the first of my taking any active part in the Santa Cruz matter; but you see fate cast me for an active part in spite of him."

"A very active part indeed," observed Lloyd—"more active, perhaps, than either of us altogether realizes." He paused, and there was a silence in which Isabel, remembering Armistead's words and looks when she saw him last, asked herself if she had a part indeed in this last development? Was this attack threatened because an angry and disappointed man was striking at her as well as at the Santa Cruz? Even in the starlight Lloyd could see how grave her face became as she turned it toward him.

"I am afraid," she said, "that my interest has perhaps done harm instead of good to the Santa Cruz."

"I think that I understand what you mean," Lloyd answered; "but I believe you are mistaken. Armistead would have done everything which he has done even if he had not felt resentment against you for possible interference with his plans."

"I am not sure of that," she replied. "When he came to see me a few days ago he told me that he

was on his way out of the country ; that he had abandoned the idea of attempting to take possession of the mine by force, and then—well, then he went away very angry, making some threats, and—the next we hear is this.”

“It seems as if there might be a connection between the threats and—this,” said Lloyd. The statement made had not been very lucid, but he grasped without difficulty an idea of what had really happened. He paused again for a moment and then turned to Miss Rivers abruptly.

“Will you let me inquire what Armistead told you about me?”

Isabel started.

“Why should you imagine that he told me anything about you?” she asked.

“I don’t imagine,” Lloyd answered: “I am sure of it. Your manner has told me so from the first moment we met at Las Joyas ; and now I only beg that your lips may be equally frank.”

“I—I really don’t see—” Isabel began ; and then something in the influence of time and place—in the solitude and remoteness which seemed to isolate them here on this mountain side, in the sense of impending danger, in the presence, as it were, of the great realities of life and the absence of its conventionalities—compelled her to the frankness he asked. “He told me,” she said, “some things which—changed my opinion of you.”

“As for example—?”

"That you are—divorced."

"Ah!" Lloyd drew in his breath sharply. "He told you that? And it changed your opinion of me! Why?"

"Do you need to ask why?" Miss Rivers was a little haughty now. "You know what I think—what every Catholic must think—of divorce."

"Yet you are now staying in the house of a divorced woman, I believe."

"Mr. Lloyd! How dare you speak so of Doña Beatriz? I—I could not have believed it of you."

"I am stating a simple fact, Miss Rivers. No one admires and respects Doña Beatriz more than I do, but she *is* a divorced woman."

"By no fault and no consent of hers."

"Exactly! And therefore you do not hold her accountable for the position in which she has been placed by the acts of another. To be consistent, then, you must extend the same tolerance to me."

"If—if it is deserved, you know that I would do so."

"Yes, I know," he said more gently. "I have never doubted your tolerance or your kindness; but I saw no cause why I should make a demand on either. My unhappy story seemed my own. There was no reason why I should trouble you with it. If I had ventured ever to approach you as an admirer—bah! let us be frank—as a lover, you would have reason for resentment; but I never ventured to do that."

She did not answer; but her memory bore witness for him, testified earnestly in his behalf, that he never had. She remembered how she had even accused him of avoiding her, of being sorry to meet her in the Quebrada Onda. And then she heard his voice speaking again.

“You must not think me ungrateful for all your kindness,” he was saying. “I have comprehended perfectly, almost from the day of our first meeting, that you recognized that life had in some way gone wrong with me, and, being much inclined to charity, were anxious to help me. I knew that you couldn’t help me—not at least in the way you desired; but I have been grateful for your sympathy, or why shouldn’t I say your pity? It is the same thing.”

“No,” she interposed now, “it is not the same. What I felt for you has been sympathy, not pity.”

“We won’t quarrel over a name,” he returned. “Sympathy or pity, or both, I have been grateful for it. Perhaps I shouldn’t have been if—well, if you were not you. I am afraid I have worn a very surly front when others offered me anything of the kind. But there’s something strangely magnetic in your mental touch. The sorest spirit might endure it. And your comprehension is wonderful. Although I have not talked of myself, you have understood that I have suffered moral shipwreck—that I am one of the bits of human flotsam and jetsam floating about the world,—and you have offered

me a compassion so gentle that I have not only not hesitated to accept it, but I have felt in it something almost like healing."

A flood of the compassion of which he spoke rose within her as she listened, mingled with a sense of wonder at herself—wonder that she could have forgotten the simplicity and sincerity which had always so deeply impressed her in all that he said or did, and that she could have felt toward him a resentment which she now acknowledged to have been unreasonable and unjust.

"I am glad," she said, "if I have been able to offer you anything even *like* healing, and I am sorry that I have been so presumptuous as to think—to do you injustice—"

"Never mind about that," he interrupted. "Perhaps you were right—perhaps I should have told you that I was a man marked with disgrace—"

"No, no! How can you say so?"

"It is what I have always felt. You see I come from a country where such a thing is held as a disgrace. We are very 'unprogressive' in the South. Divorce is almost unknown with us, and marital infidelity—for which divorce is but another name—is sternly dealt with. Having been brought up in this society, where all the old standards are still in force, you can imagine my bewilderment when I drifted to the West and found myself in a society where divorce reigned supreme; where all around one were

men and women who had been married and unmarried on the most trivial pretexts."

"I know—alas! I know only too well," she answered.

"You know," he said, "the inevitable result—how marriage in those regions has lost all its sanctity, and, outside of the Catholic Church, is regarded only as a bond to be broken at will. Knowing and seeing this, you will say that I deserved all that has befallen me because I married a women reared in that society, who, besides having no moral training, possessed no moral instincts stronger than those of a butterfly. She was a pretty frivolous creature, with whom I drifted into a flirtation and married because—well, briefly, because I was a fool. I soon paid the penalty of my folly. Having been a flirt before marriage, she continued to be a flirt afterward; and when I objected, she grew angry as at an invasion of her rights. One day I came home from a prospecting trip—we were living in a mining camp—to find my house empty, and a note from my wife telling me that she had gone to get a divorce. Of course she had no difficulty in obtaining it; and the next news I heard was that she had married a man who had been one of those most intimate in my house,—one under many obligations to me, but whom I knew to have a strain of weakness in his character which had made him peculiarly susceptible to her influence. Even before she went away I had seen the effect of this influence

on him; I had seen that she made him her confidant and that he took her side as against me in all our differences. The natural end was that as soon as she had obtained her decree of divorce he married her. His name was—is—Randolph."

Isabel started.

"Not the man whom you went back to the Quebrada Onda to meet?"

"The same," Lloyd answered. "I had heard that she had in turn divorced him, and that he had gone to the dogs about as completely as a man could go; but I was hardly prepared to find the wreck I did. The man was once, as I said, very much under my influence—before he fell under hers,—and when he appealed to me to help him out of the depths into which he had fallen, I could not refuse. And if the effort not to refuse was hard, it was rewarded: he told me what I did not know before—that the woman who had ruined both my life and his is dead."

There was a silence, after his voice fell over the last word, which lasted until Isabel said softly:

"God have mercy on her soul!"

"Amen!" Lloyd answered gravely, yet with the note of sternness with which he had told his story still in his voice. "I am willing to believe that she was only partly accountable for all the harm she did," he went on after a moment; "but it is impossible to forget how great it has been."

"Try to forget," the soft voice beside him said. "Remember that it is over now, and perhaps the suffering has taught you some things that you are the better for knowing."

"It has taught me one thing," he said, "which you will think I am the better for knowing, and that is the divine wisdom of the Catholic Church in her attitude toward divorce; and from that my eyes have been opened to recognize her divine wisdom and divine authority in all things."

"Thank God, then, for anything and everything which has brought you to that knowledge," the sweet voice said again. "Sometimes one is made ashamed of one's little faith—sometimes one has a wonderful glimpse of His purposes."

"Yes," Lloyd assented. "I feel now as if every road in my life, every step I have taken, has led straight—here; straight to some end which God, no doubt, has foreseen and purposed. If it is pain—that does not seem just now to matter. Pain, as you have said, can serve a noble end, especially if it be the pain which springs from knowing and from loving you—"

"Ah!" cried Isabel, involuntarily—quickly.

"There is no harm in telling you so, out here in the wild Sierra, so far removed from your life, as it has been and as it will be, that we might be in another world," he said quietly. "You see, I ask nothing—nothing—"

He broke off; for there was a sudden stir, a movement on the path below them, and a voice—that of Arturo—cried sharply:

“Señor!—Don Felipe!”

“Here!” Lloyd answered.

“Come—quick!” the voice went on. “The men have returned. The party is close at hand.”

“I am coming,” Lloyd said, rising to his feet.

At the same instant Miss Rivers rose too. Neither knew how her hand found its way into his.

“God be with you!” she said in a very low but very calm tone. “And remember, though you do not ask, I am ready to give—everything.”

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SURPRISE PARTY IS SURPRISED.

THE party are near at hand!" Lloyd repeated, when he joined Arturo at the entrance to the *patio* of the mine. "How near?—where are they."

Arturo made a motion indicating the other side of the mountain.

"They are in an *arroyo* over there," he said, "waiting, it is to be supposed, for a later hour of the night to surprise the mine."

"Good! Let us go to them at once. You are coming with me, are you not?"

"Certainly," Arturo answered. "But we shall take some men along, shall we not?"

"No. We are not going as a surprise party, you and I, but as envoys of peace."

"Peace is all very well," the young man returned; "but—how if they are not disposed for it?"

"Even then they can't shoot us down in cold blood, you know,—two men alone. They are not supposed to be here for murder. Come! I want to get the thing over. Where is our guide?"

"I'll call one of the men."

Arturo's tone was a little reluctant, as he turned back to the *patio*. The expedition did not please him.

Just now what he wanted, what all his young, indignant blood was clamoring for, was not peace at all, but war; and this going to offer peace to those who were ready for war was not to his liking. It was a proof of his strong regard for Lloyd, and of the latter's strong influence over him, that he consented to go; but he expressed his disgust in a few forcible words to Victoria, whom he met, while calling for one of the scouts who had lately returned.

"Knowing where they are and what they have come for, we could surprise them, we could fall upon them—wipe them out—annihilate them!" the young man cried, with flashing eyes. "But instead we are going to offer them peace—to beg them to go away—as if we were not men with arms in our hands! Oh, it is too much—too much!"

Victoria inwardly sympathized to the full with this feeling; but outwardly loyalty made it necessary for her to support her mother and Lloyd.

"You talk like a child, Arturo," she said severely. "They are not to be begged to go away; the Señor Lloyd is only going to tell them that it is useless for them to come, since we are ready for them. And he will take a party of armed men to show that we are ready."

"He refuses to do anything of the kind. We are going alone—he and I and Pedro Garcia."

"That is impossible!—that can not be permitted!" cried Victoria, in her tone of authority; and she im-

mediately went up to Lloyd, who, having also entered the *patio*, was now speaking to Don Mariano.

“Señor,” she said, “I insist that you take a party of men with you. It is impossible to trust those to whom you are going; and—and we do not wish them to think that you go because we are not prepared for them here.”

“I will render that very clear, señorita,” Lloyd replied, turning to her with a smile which even in the torchlight struck her as possessing a strange, unusual brightness. “Don’t fear that I shall not make them understand that the Santa Cruz is not the least afraid of them.”

“But you will take some men—”

“No: there is no need to do so. As I have just reminded Arturo, we are going as envoys of peace, not of war. And Armistead is not in the least a desperado. This is purely business with him; and when we have met and discussed the matter, I think he will be ready to go quietly away without running any chance of being shot himself.”

Victoria shook her head. She could not forget the look on Armistead’s face when he turned away, leaving Isabel and herself under the trees by the pools. There had not been very much of the man of business in that face just then.

“I do not believe that he will go away quietly,” she said. “I believe that he will be very angry.”

“No doubt,” Lloyd agreed. “A man is always angry when he is frustrated in something shabby;

and Armistead will recognize at once that he has been frustrated,—that he has no chance to take the Santa Cruz, now that it is prepared to resist attack. But we are wasting precious time!—Arturo!"

"Here, señor!" Arturo responded. "And here is the man who will guide us over the mountain—"

"One word, señor!" Victoria cried hastily, as he turned to go. "Where did you say that the señorita—Doña Isabel—is?"

Lloyd pointed to the boulder above the path, where, in the light of the torches, a white hand was seen to wave in that pretty Mexican salutation which is like a fluttering bird.

"It will be well, I think, for you to bring her down to the *patio* now," he said; "or else to go to her."

"I will go to her," Victoria replied; "and for you, señor—*Vaya Vd. con Dios!*"

Again, as once before, the beautiful words sounded in his ears and accompanied him like a blessing,—a blessing which his heart echoed as he went on his way. For no sunshine about his path could have made it seem brighter than that for which he had to thank God—the great blessing which had come to him, and which he was hardly able as yet to realize, in Isabel Rivers' last words. They were still ringing in his ears, and his heart was like a feather in his breast as he climbed the dark mountain steeps, conscious of strange, light-hearted impulses to laugh or sing, which would have very

much astonished his companions had he yielded to them.

So far from yielding, however, it was in perfect silence that he followed Pedro Garcia across the shoulder of the great height. They went in single file—the tall, lithe Mexican, with his soundless tread, in front; Lloyd next, and Arturo last,—although to the quick ear of the latter it seemed more than once that he was *not* last: that other, stealthy footsteps were following. Once or twice he paused and looked back, but then all was silence; the encompassing forest lay mute around them, guarding the secret of whatever life it held.

How long they had been on their way no one of them could have told; but they had left the cañon of the Santa Cruz behind, and wound around the mountain by a path known only to their guide, and were on the side opposite the mine, when the ground suddenly seemed to open beneath their feet and they found themselves looking down into an *arroyo*—a wild, picturesque ravine extremely narrow and with precipitous, forest-clad sides—where a party of men were gathered about a fire.

There was not an instant's doubt that it was the party they sought. Even if the number and arms of the men had not made this clear, it was Armistead's face on which the firelight shone most broadly as, with hat pushed back on his head, he stood looking up toward the spot where the three men were descending the hillside. As yet they

could not be seen by those below; but the dislodged stones which their feet sent down the steep declivity heralded their approach sufficiently; and one of the men by the fire, snatching up a rifle, brought it to his shoulder as he cried in Spanish:

“Who comes there?”

“Armistead,” Lloyd’s quiet voice replied, “tell that fellow to put down his rifle if he does not want his brains blown out.”

Armistead extended his hand and threw up the rifle, with a brief, energetic remark to its holder. Then, in a voice filled with anger, he said:

“So it’s you, Lloyd, is it? What do you want?”

“I want,” Lloyd answered, as he came down the mountain into the full light of the fire, accompanied by Arturo, “to save you from a blunder into which you are on the point of falling. I am here to tell you that the people of the Santa Cruz are thoroughly informed both as to your whereabouts and your intentions, and that they are ready for you. In other words, the mine is prepared for defence; and it may interest you to know that neither your party nor five times their number could take it.”

“It is exceedingly kind of you to come and give me this information,” Armistead returned sarcastically; “but I am inclined to think that if it were true, the Santa Cruz would have quietly awaited the arrival of my party.”

“The Santa Cruz would have waited with the greatest pleasure,” Lloyd said, “but for its owner,

Doña Beatriz. Shameful as she knows this attempt at robbery to be, she is most anxious that no blood shall be shed in defence of her rights. Now, there is nothing more absolutely certain than that blood will be shed if you attempt to seize the Santa Cruz. Therefore, to save her from pain, as well as incidentally to save you from a tremendous blunder and perhaps a violent death, I have come over the mountain, accompanied by my friend, Don Arturo Vallejo, son of the *administrador* of the Santa Cruz”—Arturo bowed with the air of a minister plenipotentiary,—“to put the state of the case before you. If you care to attempt to take the mine after this warning, I can only say that we shall be happy to oblige you with a fight. But if you are wise”—the speaker’s voice took a deeply significant tone—“you will be glad to have a good excuse to drop the business and get out of the Sierra—alive.”

Armistead during this speech had leaned against a tree, his arms folded, his eyes half closed but never leaving Lloyd, his lips wearing a bitter sneer. When he answered it was in a tone of concentrated fury.

“In return for your kind advice, I should like to inquire how much the Santa Cruz is paying for your extremely valuable services? I am aware that you betrayed my plans to them when you deserted my service—”

“You know that you are lying,” Lloyd interrupted coolly; “and, considering that no one present understands what you are saying except myself—and

Don Arturo perhaps,—it seems very ineffectual and a great waste of time. Come, Armistead! have sense enough to recognize that when you came into the Sierra to take the Santa Cruz you came on a fool's errand, and that you owe your life to-night to a woman's compassion. If we had allowed you to come to the mine—well, there wouldn't have been very many of you left to go back."

"We could have given an account of some of you!" Armistead snarled.

"No doubt," Lloyd agreed; "but you wouldn't have taken the Santa Cruz. Don't make any mistake about that. Now I'll go. I've too good an opinion of your sense to think that you are likely to come over the mountain after what I have told you. But if you should decide to do so, we will be ready for you. That's all I have to say."

He turned as he spoke, and in the same moment Armistead's hand went to his hip pocket. The next instant he stood, revolver in hand—facing the long, pearl-handled pistol which, quick as lightning, Arturo had drawn and with which he covered him.

"So you would shoot a man in the back, señor, and one who had come to you as a friend!" the young Mexican cried in a high key of indignation.

At the words Lloyd wheeled around, drawing his own pistol as he turned. Then he saw that the situation was threatening enough. Arturo indeed held Armistead covered, so that he could not level the revolver he had drawn; but at the first sign of a pos-

sible fight the men in the background had snatched up rifles and drawn pistols, and only Lloyd's stern face and levelled weapon held them (temporarily as he knew) in check.

"The first man that draws trigger I will shoot down where he stands!" he shouted in Spanish; and there was a gleam in his eye, as well as a ring in his voice, which told them that he meant what he said. "It can't be that you are such cowards as to begin a fight with two men alone, who have come into your camp as friends. If you want to fight, come like men to the Santa Cruz, and we will give you all you like."

"If you don't order those men to put down their guns," said Arturo to Armistead, "I will send a bullet into your heart instantly."

There was no mistaking the sincerity and determination of the speaker. His blazing eyes and set face seconded the threat so well that Armistead—a brave enough man as men go, and one who had faced danger often and creditably—knew that never before had he been so close to death as when looking at the barrel of the pistol which covered him now. He turned and gave the order commanded. As the men somewhat reluctantly and sullenly obeyed it by lowering their weapons, there was a sound on the hillside above which made everyone start and look upward.

It was the same sound, or succession of sounds, which had accompanied the approach of Lloyd and

Arturo—stones dislodged and thrown downward by descending steps, boughs broken or crackling under advancing feet. Lloyd and Arturo shot a quick glance of interrogation at each other, while the men, without waiting for orders, caught up their guns again; but as they did so there was another sound on the foliage-covered mountain side—the ominous click of many triggers.

“Drop your arms!” a voice cried peremptorily in Spanish—the voice, as Arturo instantly recognized, of the foreman of the Santa Cruz—“or we will pour a volley into you. The first man that fires a shot goes down!”

The men stared at each other for a moment, and then obeyed the order with a haste that indicated how entirely they grasped the situation. There was, in fact, not a chance for resistance. They were caught in a trap and commanded by unseen but none the less unmistakably evident foes. For keen eyes, searching the hillside, could catch the gleam of rifle barrels through the foliage; and there was not one so stupid as to fail to realize that the tables had been turned upon them in the most unexpected fashion; that they who had intended to surprise were themselves completely surprised and taken at a hopeless disadvantage.

Armistead, grasping the full significance of the situation, turned upon Lloyd, cursing him furiously.

“This is what it meant—your pretending to come alone, to give a warning and talk peace!” he cried.

"You were talking while your companions were getting into position to shoot us down, themselves unseen."

"As you proposed to shoot the men of the Santa Cruz," a quiet voice replied,—a voice so unexpected and so familiar that Lloyd and Armistead started as if they had been shot. The next moment Miss Rivers walked deliberately out of the shadow of the hillside growth into the open space illuminated by the light of the fire. She was followed by Victoria, and there was an audible murmur of amazed comment among the men when the two feminine figures appeared and paused between the two hostile forces.

There are cases on record—chiefly in fiction—of women who have appeared in such situations and on such occasions as forbidders of strife, gentle bearers of the olive-branch of peace; but there was no suggestion of that kind about these two young women. No one could look at Victoria's bent brows and flashing eyes without feeling that if she followed her inclination a volley from the rifles above would blaze out very quickly. And even Miss Rivers' charming face was set in stern lines, and her dilated eyes were full of indignant light as she fastened them on Armistead.

"I answer for Doña Victoria, because she does not speak English very well," she went on in a clear, ringing tone. "She wishes you to know that Mr. Lloyd had nothing whatever to do with the coming of the men whose guns hold the hillside above. He

refused to take any party with him, and insisted on going to you accompanied only by Don Arturo. But Doña Victoria did not believe that this was safe. She had little faith in the honor of men who would come on such an errand as yours; and her doubts have been fully justified. So, to protect, if necessary, those who went to you on behalf of her mother, she took a party of men from the mine and followed. You know whether or not we have come in time; whether or not you and the cowards in your pay”—she sent a sweeping glance of brilliant scorn, for which no interpreter was needed, around the circle of silent men—“were not ready to murder the two men who had come to you as friendly envoys.”

“Extremely friendly!” Armistead said with a bitter sneer. “And have I the pleasure of speaking to the commander of the rescue party when I address Miss Rivers?”

“You know that you have not,” Miss Rivers replied. “I have simply accompanied Doña Victoria Calderon, who *does* command it, and who will now speak to you herself. I have no doubt that you know Spanish enough to understand her.”

She turned as she spoke to Victoria, who stepped a little forward. As she did so Lloyd thought that he had never seen anything quite so splendid as her appearance and attitude. With her superb figure in a pose of unconscious command, her fine head thrown back on its slender throat, and her dark eyes

shining under their bent brows, she looked like a queen on the point of delivering sentence to rebellious subjects.

“Besides what the señorita has been good enough to say for me in order that it may not be misunderstood, I have nothing to say to you, señor,” she said, addressing Armistead, “except to give you this message for—the man who sent you here. Tell him that, for the sake of the God of whom he knows nothing, and to save my mother from further suffering, I, Victoria Calderon, have allowed you to go with your life from these lands of the Santa Cruz upon which you have come with arms in your hands. But assure him that if ever you, or any one else, come back on such an errand, you will not go away alive. Understand this clearly; for in the Sierra what we say we do. Now, you and all your men will lay your arms down there”—she indicated a spot not far from where Lloyd and Arturo stood. “And if you have any disposition to refuse, I need only remind you that every man here is covered by a rifle.”

Armistead, white to the lips with rage and mortification, turned to his men.

“There is nothing else to be done,” he said. “They are cowards—they have the advantage of us,—they will not come out in the open to fight like men.”

“Your taunts are useless, señor,” Victoria said quickly. “My men will obey my orders; and those orders are that no blood shall be shed, unless”—and

very stern was her voice here—"you force the shedding on us. Lay down your arms!"

There was no mistaking the peremptory command of her tone; and a slight stir among the foliage above as of the men taking aim, seconded it with excellent effect. Armistead threw the revolver, which up to this time he had held in his hand, on the ground; and one by one the men brought their rifles and piled them up at the spot designated. The business proceeded in unbroken silence under Victoria's eye, Lloyd and Arturo standing beside her with cocked pistols in hand. When the last man had deposited his gun and fallen back, she spoke again:

"Now you will all leave the lands of the hacienda at once. Arturo, take half a dozen men from there"—she nodded to the hillside—"and march them to the *camino real*. When you leave them, give this"—she stooped and picked up Armistead's revolver—"to the *señor*, since he is a stranger in the Sierra."

Ten minutes later the sullen, captured men had been marched away by Arturo and his armed band; and the victors, standing over the heap of guns, looked at one another as if hardly realizing what had been accomplished. Miss Rivers was the first to speak, as she threw her arms around Victoria.

"Isn't she magnificent!" she cried to Lloyd. "Could anybody—any *man*—have done better?"

"No general could have done better," he replied. "It was a military movement admirably conceived

and perfectly executed. Doña Victoria, I believe that I owe you my life, and it was never worth so much to me as to-night."

"Ah!" said Victoria, with a little gasp. Her glance went swiftly from one to the other of the two faces before her, and she read plainly what had happened in the eyes of each. She clasped Isabel close, while she held out her hand to Lloyd.

"*Gracias á Dios!*" she cried.



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